

***Developing a Visual Language That Engages With  
Contemporary Dissent and Critical Opinion***

by

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the requirements for the Degree of

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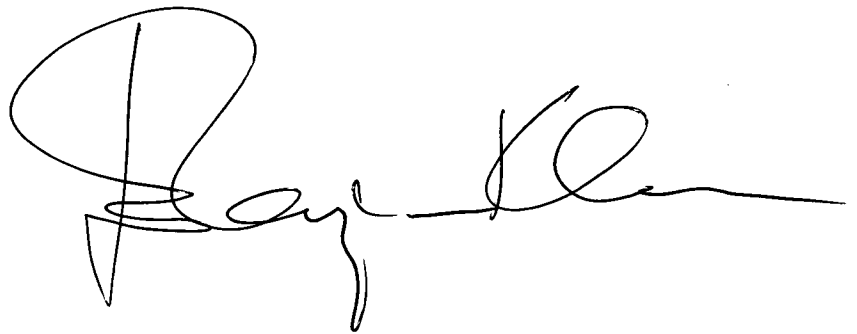
***Declaration of Originality***

I, Benjamin Kluss, declare the material presented here to be original, except where due acknowledgment is given, and that it has not been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin Kluss'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'B' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.



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A handwritten signature in black ink. The first part of the signature is a large, stylized capital 'R' that loops around. This is followed by the lowercase letters 'ay', and then a capital 'K' that also has a loop. The signature ends with a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line.

*I would like to acknowledge the guidance and  
insights of my supervisor, Paul Zika. Thank you.*

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## Chapter One – Central Argument

In my Honours work in 2005 I visually pursued ideas of revolt, terror and ambivalence as being indicative of both personal and collective contemporary experience.

In this Project I have visually explored ideas of *duplicity* and *obfuscation* as being indicative of both contemporary politics and the mass media, and of their mutually parasitic/symbiotic relationship to each other. The main vehicle for this investigation is the *found image*, specifically that of the *political figure*, and of the figure's relationship to the representational methodologies of the mass media. These figures are employed in various configurations to construct 'political landscape'. The work is about how politics and the development of political meaning occur *within* the mass media, and in turn how political figures manipulate their public image through, or are manipulated by, the mass media. This process indicates complicity by the *mass audience*<sup>1</sup> (the public) in the perpetuation of these contrivances. Politicians candidly describe this duplicitous operation as the 'public perception' of issues and personas. The larger significance of this manipulation of 'public perception' is that we overlook, forgive and forget of our own (western culture's) criminal transgressions and punish the transgressions of the 'other', in often brutal and over-zealous ways.

I construct 'political landscape' tied to a particular time, place, and/or issue, employing the *political figure* as a *signifier* of this landscape. These 'landscapes' are generated through the use of *images* and *methodologies* sourced from the mass media.

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<sup>1</sup> MacLuhan, Marshall, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, 1967, p.22

## Matters of concern

This project is tied to what I term my *matters of concern*. My main concerns are the perceived layers of secrecy, duplicity and obfuscation that occur in contemporary political dealings between politicians and the public, between the government and business, and between business and the public. This apparent duplicity and obfuscation occurs on a local, national and international level and acts as a hindrance towards achieving meaningful solutions to problems. Perceived problems being: the environment, war, terrorism, social wellbeing and mental health, fair trade, and matters relating to property rights and ownership. In turn, I am concerned with the way the mass media plays both an active and a passive role as the vehicle that perpetuates this duplicity and obfuscation and, conversely, the role it plays in highlighting and exposing these layers of duplicity and obfuscation. In essence, my primary concern is the *media environment* as the underlying context in which all other matters of concern take place, and in turn is the shaping force to how we perceive those matters.

These matters of concern resolve within my artistic practice as personal, sensuous and materially grounded responses to lived experience, and also as emblematic, typical and 'idealised' world views that speak more through the collective, the abstract, and the non empirical.<sup>2</sup>

In a deliberate attempt to engage with the *local*, as a site for meaningful interaction, I have pursued my matters of concern especially as they relate to Tasmania during the period 2006-2007. I have also pursued these matters of concern as they relate to broader national (Australian) issues and how the *local* and the *national* can relate in a micro/macro way to the broader geopolitical issues facing the contemporary world; that is, the observation of *duplicity* and *obfuscation* in the *local* as being indicative of the *duplicity* and *obfuscation* in the *global*, and vice-versa.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Witkin in *Art & Social Structure* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) attributes these ideas to Albert Hauser, in a description of pictorial presentational codes. He delineates two broad presentational codes (or stylistic) tendencies in art: a perceptual realist code (naturalistic representation) and a formalist code (abstracted) – each presenting unique ways of seeing and interpreting. This will be discussed in Chapter 2 as well as in chapter 3 in relation to specific works.

Considerations of *time* and *place* are somewhat negated by a *media environment* that is occurring *everywhere, simultaneously* and *instantly*.

## Methodology

As an artist I employ a deliberately *ironic* mode of operation that acts as a deconstructive force attempting to unmask political and media pretension. This deconstruction and unmasking occurs through mimicking and subverting that pretension. This mode of operation is engaged with creating new patterns of recognition and developing non-linear connections with the aim of fostering new understandings of media and political pretension<sup>3</sup>.

I go about this by making art works (paintings) that employ media sourced imagery relating to present-centred matters of concern, especially as they relate to the mass media as *vehicle* of those concerns. My primary technique for the production of these paintings is that of the stencil and the spray can, techniques synonymous with the 'street'. I search the media for images and information that suggest this perceived duplicity and obfuscation, as well as for images that can act as counterpoints, synergies or catalysts (e.g. images of Paris Hilton) within the work. It is an ongoing process of research, response and articulation. I then employ a careful orchestration and juxtaposition of these found images, as stencils, to describe new or alternative realities in a manner not dissimilar to that of the Dadaists, the Cubists and the Surrealists in their use of montage/collage.

I have two main approaches to the orchestration and juxtaposition of images within the work. The first method is that of a *spatial* orchestration (or installation), where the emphasis is placed on the groupings of individual works within a gallery space (e.g. *Common Ground, Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*) (fig.1). The second method is that of montage/collage, where a number of images/referents operate within the *same* picture frame (e.g. *First We Take Paris*) (fig.2). This second method has its contemporary roots in the photomontage works of the Dadaists during the early twentieth century. Both

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<sup>3</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p.63

of these methods are employed in order to develop new or alternative realities, discourse and dissonance, through juxtaposition.



(fig.1) *Common Ground*, installation view, BUS Gallery, Melbourne



(fig.2) *First We Take Paris then We Take the World*, installation view, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport

## Intention

My intention is to develop a sophisticated visual language that engages with contemporary dissent and critical opinion, which can also engage with a broad, non-specialist audience. This project relies on the production of work that can be viewed in the present context as response and critique, and in an historical context as a kind of 'memory bank' for society. This strategy necessitates an awareness of issues and events as they relate to my matters of concern, and an ability to reposition and reconsider those concerns as an acknowledgement of both a personal and non-personal world that exists in a state of flux. This state of flux relates to both empirical and idealistic worldviews; that is, the flux of the physical world of armies, cyclones and geographical borders, and the flux of the non-physical world of ideology, politics and ownership.

Another key strategy has been to actively seek ways to disseminate the work I produce as widely as possible, employing methods such as the street, the Internet and the mass media itself as vehicles for this dissemination. This

strategy is linked with the idea of memes<sup>4</sup>, of infiltrating popular culture and with a desire to develop a public forum for my work, especially for those matters of concern contained within the work.

The combination of these strategies; that of developing a sophisticated visual language and that of developing channels for this visual language to be disseminated, form a third strategy, which I term *counter-spin*. At this point I would like to make a distinction between spin and propaganda. Political spin is the biased presentation of information to suit one's favour, often employing disingenuous or manipulative tactics to do so.<sup>5</sup> The nature of spin is that it is often cooked up on the go by political advisors and politicians for press conferences, image management and damage control. In this sense, we can read spin as being tactical, responsive and essentially duplicitous. Propaganda however is "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."<sup>6</sup>



(fig.4) Government media advertisement, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. Dawkins describes a meme as "a unit of cultural transmission... (that) propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins (1989) p.192)

<sup>5</sup> Adequate description of political spin sourced from en.wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spin\\_\(public\\_relations\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spin_(public_relations)) – (visited 20.01.08)

<sup>6</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., London: Sage, 2006, p.7



In this sense we could read Propaganda as strategic – more akin to the development of the visual imagery and advertising surrounding a sustained campaign (for example the Howard governments' 'WorkChoices' (fig.3)) as distinct from the tactical response to that propaganda once it is launched, the justifications, the management of *perceptions*, the dumbing down of arguments etc. which is the tactical response of *spin*. Interestingly, the government withdrew the ad linked to its propaganda surrounding 'WorkChoices' (fig.3) and went into *spin control* when the following was revealed:

*The scandal has forced Workplace Relations Minister Joe Hockey to urgently take Government pro-WorkChoices ads off air with revelations that an actor starring in the ads also ran a painting business in Melbourne and allegedly ripped off junior workers thousands of dollars... The Government's extraordinary action follows an investigation by a major newspaper into the actor who hypocritically appears in the \$37 million taxpayer-funded IR ads as a 'concerned father' that says: "I'm being told employers can rip off young kids."<sup>7</sup>*

In order to deconstruct and expose the contrivances of *political spin* (that is, *duplicity* and *obfuscation*), I employ *ironic* visual devices in a responsive and tactical manner. The overall strategy of this process, I term *counter-spin*.

## Sources

My images come from the mass media, primarily daily newspapers and the Internet – most Internet images being sourced from the sites of daily newspapers! I choose to source images specifically from these places for the following reasons.

Firstly, big media is big business. Big media is oligarchic and controls the main flow of information in the contemporary world. Using images sourced

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<sup>7</sup> This quote sourced from:  
<http://www.actu.asn.au/Campaigns/YourRightsatWork/YourRightsatWorknews/NewWorkChoicesadvertisingscandalshowsHowardGovtcantidetruthaboutIRlaws.aspx> – (visited 18.01.08)

from big media is an inherently *ironic* critique of that fact. Through this process, I adopt a 'Robin Hood' approach of stealing visual information from the information rich to redistribute, altered, to the information poor. Tariq Ali, political author and historian, makes these observations:

*<Media companies> are the watchdogs of the establishment and increasingly the space for divergent views is getting narrower and narrower... I see two causes. One is the corporatization of the media. You have eight giant companies that own the bulk of the world's media. The second is that they're so dominant that what is left outside their control tries to imitate and mimic them, so public television networks are not taking up issues that challenge authority as they used to.*<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, contemporary politics lives *in* the mass media. Although there are places such as Parliament House, where formal debate and policy announcements occur, for the near absolute majority of the public, politics occurs *within* the media: on television; in newspapers; in magazines; on the Internet. As an extension of this idea, I propose that all contemporary life occurs *in a mediated environment*. In the same sense that Martin Warnke, in his book *Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature*, proposes that the natural environment has been usurped by the construct of the 'landscape' and of man's impact upon it<sup>9</sup>, I would propose that the human 'mental environment' has been usurped by the construct of *media*, and in turn by the vested interest of politics and business *in that media*.

Images produced by the mass media also have an historical and cultural *currency* with the viewing public. They are images that are imbedded with explicitly controlled and stereotypical methods of framing, angle, light, choreography, expression etc.<sup>10</sup> Media images also employ various devices, intentionally or otherwise, that have been handed down through the traditions

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Campbell & Tariq Ali, *Confronting Empire: a conversation with Tariq Ali*, Adbusters, #69 Vol. 15 No. 1, 2007

<sup>9</sup> Martin Warnke, *Political Landscape: the Art History of Nature*, London: Reaktion Books, 1994, pp.145-146

<sup>10</sup> John Voss discusses the methodologies and stereotypes of press photography in his PhD Exegesis: *Photographic Representation and Veracity in the Australian Political Arena* (University of Tasmania, 2003). Voss had a working life as a press photographer prior to his artistic career. Voss's work is discussed in Chapter 2.

of Western visual culture across the centuries<sup>11</sup>. These devices generally convey meaning or emotion, a certain 'loading' or 'baggage'. This process, over time and across culture, has created a conditioned response in us, the viewing public. We have been conditioned to read these images in a certain way, and we are aware of these readings even if we are not aware of the conditioning that has occurred. This generates an automated, sensuous response to an image, from a source that may or may not have our best intentions at heart. Through a process that operates in an *ironic* mode, I attempt to deconstruct and unmask this process in my work.

*Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible. The ground rules, pervasive structure, and over-all patterns of environments elude easy perception. Anti-environments, or counter-situations made by artists, provide means of direct attention and enable us to see and understand more clearly.*<sup>12</sup>

## Implications

Media images have a connection with the idea of *truth*; that is, media images are presented as matters of fact, as empirical and naturalistic representations that lead us to *trust* what we see. This can be attributed, in no small part, to an historical perceptual-realist tradition in Western art culture<sup>13</sup>. Although, as John Voss explains, this perception is based in duplicity:

*Politicians and their teams on the one hand must organise themselves around media operations. On the other hand the media uses political presentations for serious (often-actual news) content. The pragmatics of wooing, or at least not scaring off, politicians can combine with often-elaborate information packages supplied by the political team to make the media seem like the public relations company for those political entities.*<sup>14</sup>

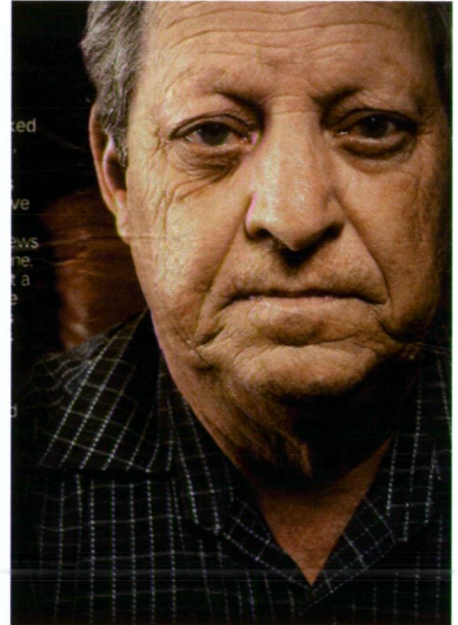
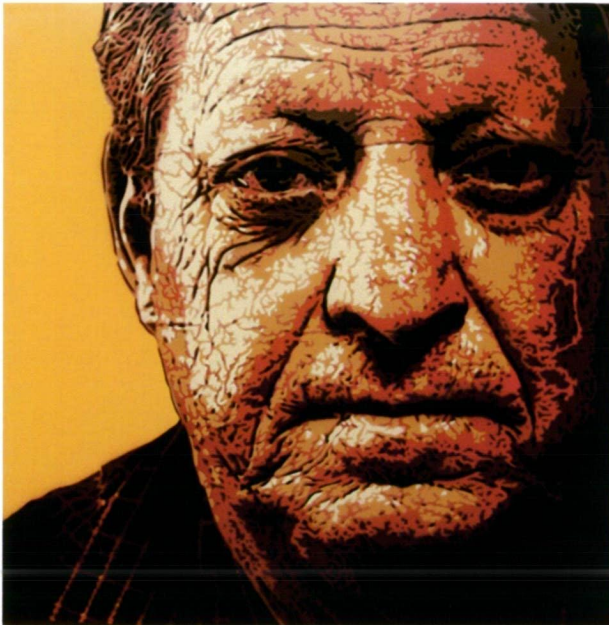
<sup>11</sup> The basis for this claim is eloquently put forward by Stephen F. Eisenman in his book *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), where he discusses the historically and culturally loaded phenomenon of the *pathos formulae*, which is discussed in Chapter 2 and in relation to specific work in Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p. 68

<sup>13</sup> Robert Witkin, *Art & Social Structure*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, pp.1-28

<sup>14</sup> John Voss, *Photographic Representation and Veracity in the Australian Political Arena: PhD Exegesis*, Hobart: University of Tasmania, 2003, p.40

As an artist employing these often 'spin-doctored' media images, I critique this process and also become complicit in it. Through becoming complicit in the process, I pursue this element of perceived *truth* and *fact*; even when the images I produce are clearly of the *emblematic* and of the *ideal*.



left: (fig.4) *Terry Hicks*, 2006      right: (fig.5) Original media image.

An implication of presenting images sourced from the mass media as fine art, is the transformation of these images from the *mundane* into the *significant*; that is, from the everyday material world into the symbolic world of ideas and poetics. Through this transformation it is possible for images to gain a weight, or presence, that they did not possess in their *mundane* form. An example of how this could be seen to have occurred within my work is in the example of *Terry Hicks* (fig.4), a depiction of the father of convicted Australian terrorist, David Hicks. The source image for this work was a photograph printed in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* (fig.5). I have not seen any further reproductions of this source image in any other media, including on the Internet. However, the transformation of this image into the artwork *Terry Hicks*, has seen this *copy* (my work) disseminated throughout a range of media including newspapers, journals, magazines, brochures and the

Internet.<sup>15</sup> A Google image search for 'Terry Hicks' returns the image of my artwork as the first result<sup>16</sup>. This phenomenon could be attributed to the transformation of the *mundane* press photograph into the *symbolic* work of art, a process that impregnates an empirical, or *matter of fact*, image with an ideal, a message, or a *matter of concern*. This process is another part of our *conditioning*; we have been historically conditioned to view artwork, especially painting, as being *significant*, of belonging to a higher field. In mentioning this, I do not wish to infer that the original photograph is in any way inferior to my artwork – in fact quite the opposite – it was the power of this photograph that grabbed my attention in the first place. I have mentioned this in order to illustrate a process of transformation.

Without detracting any merit contained within an individual press photographer's work, mass media images are generic and disposable. They usually exist for around 24 hours before being thrown in the rubbish or recycling bin. On the Internet their lifespan is extended slightly, newspaper sites leaving images attached to articles online for about a week or so before removing them to be placed in a 'purchase images' section. On the Internet their quality is also reduced to about 300px at 72dpi. Images on the Internet, whilst officially being removed by their original host media site reasonably quickly, can be copied and distributed easily. On the Internet, popular images (usually of a humorous or shocking nature) will live on in a plethora of various sites and mutating forms ad infinitum.

So this leads to a connection between the media images that I source and the dissemination of the work itself, which is its *viral* nature. On the Internet, television, and in printed media, images endlessly resurface and repeat in a circuitous and infectious way, spreading between media formats, across channels, through independent 'blogs'<sup>17</sup> and eventually as mutations in the form of parodies and media-montages. So too, these media images infiltrate my work, often spreading across different paintings, and then as paintings

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix II.

<sup>16</sup> Appendix II: b)

<sup>17</sup> Web-slang for Web Log – a popular, Internet based, self-publishing tool used by both amateurs and professionals alike.



they are digitally photographed, becoming images once more and re-entering various media as another strain of this mutating virus.

## Modes

The art I produce employs signifiers from what could be termed the 'street', primarily, the spray can, the stencil and the poster aesthetic. I have spent time creating works on the street as well as in the studio, so each aspect of this hybridised practice has influenced the other. The studio work has refined what I would consider a fairly 'raw' street aesthetic; and in turn, the 'street' work has served to loosen up my studio work, enabling me to develop several methods of generating spontaneity and immediacy in painting. One of these 'methods of immediacy' was the development of a freehand spray painting technique on the street that later developed into a studio based 'realist shorthand' (*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities* - Fig.5).



(fig.5) *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*, 2007, installation view

In regards to the abstraction and flattening out of the *stencilled* form, Robert Witkin, in a discussion of Cubism, suggests that:

*...in modern art flatness results from the negation of representation, from the triumphant affirmation of the aesthetic surface, from insisting upon the work of art as a self-contained and self-possessed field of signification.*<sup>18</sup>

This 'self-possessed field of signification' is essential to the earlier notion of the transformation of the mundane media image into a more *significant* form. These aesthetic considerations of the *stencil* have necessitated a shift, to and from, stencilling and other modes of representation; such as, 'freehand' spray techniques and also brush techniques in later works.

I would describe the work produced throughout this project as *realist political landscapes*. There are three distinct bodies of work, each depicting a different political landscape in terms of both time and place. The first is an installation of a series of wall works concerned with the Australian political landscape at the time of the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) scandal titled *Common Ground*. These works employ stencils to depict various figures in a stylised, semi-abstracted form. The second is a series of paintings concerned with the Tasmanian political landscape titled *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*. These works employ a semi-realist rendering of figure through the use of freehand aerosol painting techniques. The third body of work, *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*, is a series of montage paintings concerned with the Tasmanian and Australian political landscape of mid 2007.<sup>19</sup> This body of work employs stencils, freehand aerosol and brushed oil painting techniques, in a hybridised evolution of the earlier works.

The work is also a form of protest art; however, it is a protest that is ambivalent in its statements, enough to make the subject of the protest unclear, or obscure. This deliberately *ironic* mode of operation serves to create a state of uncertainty, or unease, in the viewer that is essential to inquiry and cognitive discourse. This ambivalence and *ironic* mode of operation is often

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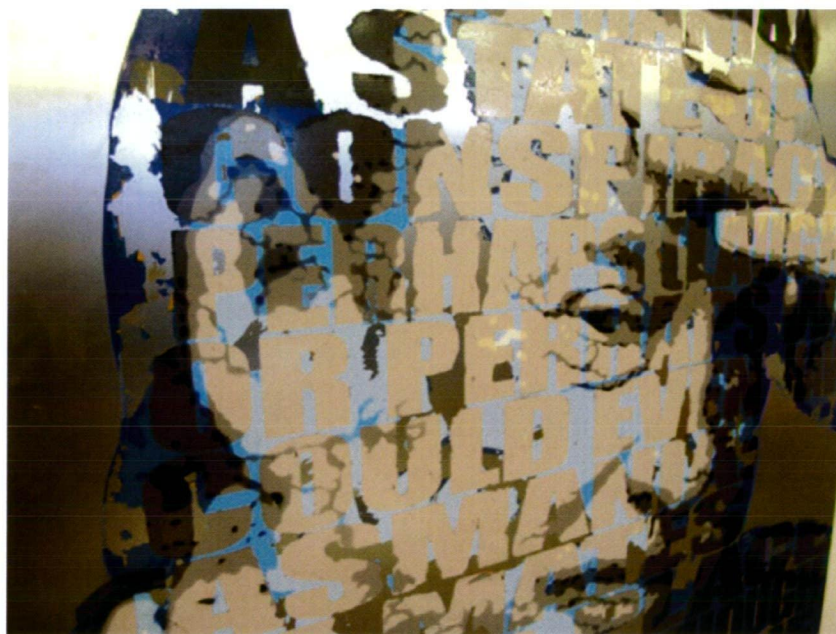
<sup>18</sup> Witkin (1995) p.109

<sup>19</sup> This period marked several controversies and much public debate regarding the proposal of a pulp mill by Tasmanian company Gunns Ltd. This period was also the lead up to the Australian Federal election of 2007.

attributed to both the Dadaists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Pop Artists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is often remarked that the ironic works of these movements hovered between critique and celebration, and in the case of the Pop Artists, it could be argued that culture has judged their work as a celebration. I have also engaged with this state of ambivalence as a means of attempting to overcome didactic readings in the work, and in turn as a means of encouraging inquiry.

## Form

As suggested above, this work is a hybrid art form in many senses of the word: there is a hybridity of technique that combines stencils, freehand spray paint and oil paint; there is a hybridity of location from street to gallery to mass media (continued below); there is a hybridity of image that occurs through montage and juxtaposition; and there is a hybridity of abstraction/reduction (through the use of stencils) with realist representation (through the employment of brush and aerosol rendering). These hybrids create *tensions* in the work that serve to highlight the tensions inherent in the *matters of concern*. These inherent tensions are also apparent in the hybrid works of contemporary artists Gordon Bennett, Ben Frost and Sheppard Fairey, who I will discuss in Chapter 2.



(fig.6) "The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties...", 2006 (detail)



Some of these more formal, inherent *tensions* are what I have termed *form as content*. This is a deliberate attempt to embody the *look* of the work with indicators of my *matters of concern*. In this project, the main formal element that I have employed to convey content is *corruption*. This formal corruption occurs in *stylistic* elements of the work as well as in *physical* elements of the work. This is most clearly demonstrated in “*The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties...*” (fig.6). In this painting, every line is corrupted, and the paint is even peeling from the surface. There is also evidence of the formal device of *camouflage*, which has been used to convey the content of *duplicity*.<sup>20</sup> In the final series of works, *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*, there is a shift away from the aesthetics of *corruption* towards something more slick, more like a magazine or billboard aesthetic. This shift is towards a *populist* aesthetic.

## Personas

In addition to the hybridity that occurs within the formal elements of the work, there is a hybridity within my own operations as an artist, a hybrid *persona*. I produce artwork as both Benjamin Kluss and as ‘Jamin’. Jamin began as a street name, a moniker or *tag*, that was associated with works that occurred on the street, and also with a street and studio art collective called *Die Laughing* (with Paicey and Empire – also monikers), which we formed in 2004. I have gone on to use this name in media releases, reviews and articles, in business, for gallery exhibitions, and as an Internet persona. This dualistic approach is ironic in itself, as it mirrors the methods of a politician’s ‘public persona’ or *façade*, and mimics celebrity monikers and personas. However, where a politician or celebrity creates the persona or *façade* in order to attract attention and notoriety, the graffiti artist conversely adopts the moniker to avoid recognition. In this sense, it is a similar play of personas to that described by Sub-comandante Marcos, of the Mexican Zapatista movement, when he describes how the Zapatistas wear their masks in order to reveal

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<sup>20</sup> These ideas are expanded upon in Chapter 3 in relation to specific works.

themselves, and then remove their masks in order to 'hide' within the local population.<sup>21</sup>

As a direct result of this engagement with an artistic sub-culture (street art), as 'Jamin' I have developed an alternative platform for the dissemination of my work. This extends to many areas of Australia, including Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. Through active involvement with members of the 'street art' scene in those places, as well as through numerous group exhibitions, a solo exhibition, and being engaged with the *Stencil Festival*<sup>22</sup> since 2005, I have developed networks and channels outside of the 'mainstream' art world, as well as within it. This aspect of the work is essential to its dissemination.

## Conclusion

In this project I have set out to develop a visual language engaged with dissent and critical opinion. The work produced in this project, and the ideas that have been seeded, will form a cornerstone for developing this language further in my future endeavours. I have made artworks that can act as a 'memory bank' for society, that highlight *duplicity* and *obfuscation* through *ironic* processes, and that are able to enter into mainstream media and popular culture through virtue of their accessibility, and through the employment of various channels of dissemination. The work discusses the *media environment* as the ground in which political issues take place.

I locate my work in several places: the gallery, the street, the media and the Internet. I view these locations as opportunities for dissemination, linked in with the strategic goals I have outlined above. Additionally, these locations are employed to engage with the viral nature of images in an attempt to infiltrate collective consciousness, or popular culture, with the images I produce as a form of *culture jamming*.

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<sup>21</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, *Our Words Are Our Weapon*, ed. Juana Ponce De Leon, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000

<sup>22</sup> I was one of the two 'featured' artists of the 2007 Stencil Festival, touring Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and a number of regional areas. Nearly all promotional material for this festival featured an image of my work.

In terms of locating the work back in the mass media from which it was sourced, I have actively pursued this process; utilising channels of dissemination to have images of my work reproduced in various media whenever possible. This has occurred through press releases, critical reviews, interviews and promotional material as well as through the Internet. This sets up what I term a *media-loop*; that is, the re-presenting, or feeding back in, of images sourced from the mass media *into* that media itself, altered by my hand. This then becomes an *ironic critique* of the processes of the media.

This Project has developed a visual language engaged with dissent and critical opinion through engaging with the *media environment*. We cannot rely on *matters of fact* (as presented by this environment) as being true or concrete; and so all we are left with are *matters of concern*, which we *also* engage with through this mediated environment. It follows then, that the medium *is* the message, and the *message* is a critique *of* the *medium* – not, as I initially thought, *of politics*. The ‘street’ is the *signifier*, politics is the *referent*, and media is the *signified*.

## Chapter Two – Contexts

This chapter contains three sections.

The first section deals with the broader contexts of this project, centred on my *matters of concern*. This section discusses those concerns and introduces the ideas of Noam Chomsky, Harold Pinter and Stephen F. Eisenman, in relation to those concerns.

The second section outlines the field of significance in which I *locate* my matters of concern; that is, the *media environment*. This includes discussions on media itself (Marshall MacLuhan), social structure and its relationship to art (Robert W. Witkins), and a proposition for a contemporary method of painting the *political landscape* (Martin Warnke). This section also introduces the 'street' and its relationship to the *media environment*. This section is illustrated with the work of artists including John Heartfield, Ben Frost, Gordon Bennett and Shepard Fairey.

The third section looks at the work of three contemporary Tasmanian artists in an effort to locate the global *media environment* in the *local*. These artists have been selected through virtue of each occupying a different (yet connected) area of my matters of concern, as set out in the first two sections. They are: Geoff Parr, John Voss, and Megan Keating.

## Section One – Power, Control and Lies.

As outlined in Chapter 1, there are a number of core concerns that drive my production of art. These concerns are located in the material world of actions, of cultures and of histories. They are primarily to do with power, the abuse of power, and war (or conflict) as a means to achieve that power. What interests me most, and is exemplified by my engagement with the themes of *duplicity* and *obfuscation*, is that our Western Culture (and especially the USA in recent times) readily forgives, forgets and even fails to acknowledge our own criminal transgressions, whilst actively and often brutally pursuing the exposure and punishment of the transgressions of the 'other'. The 'other' most often refers to poor (though often resource-rich), non-white, non-first world countries and their populations, though the term can extend to anyone who supports them, and even those sidelined minority groups within our own culture.

In the months following the events of September 11, 2001, Noam Chomsky *"must have repeated a thousand times his argument that we cannot address terrorism of the weak against the powerful without also confronting 'the unmentionable but far more extreme terrorism of the powerful against the weak'"*.<sup>23</sup> It is in this spirit that my artwork approaches these matters of concern. Chomsky, a renowned intellectual and author, rigorously interrogates and presents the global historical situations of the last one hundred years or so, highlighting the transgressions of the 'developed' or Western world against the 'other'. He presents these histories in order to bring them to light, precisely because they are kept in the dark, as he explains:

*So, yes, if you count crimes, it's an ugly record, but it's only the enemies crimes that count. They're the ones that we deplore and agonize about, and so on. Our own, which may be monstrously worse, they just don't enter into our field of vision. You don't study them, you don't read about them,*

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<sup>23</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Power and Terror: Post-9/11 Talks and Interviews*, eds. John Junkerman & Takei Masakazu, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003, p.7

*you don't think about them, nobody writes about them. We're just not allowed to think about them, and if we agree to that, that's our choice.*<sup>24</sup>

This is not a justification for the actions of terrorists; it is an interrogation of our own motives and actions that have led to the *situation* of terrorism. Even the word terror implies the 'other' as monsters, without consideration for our own monstrous actions.

And it is not just our apathy, our non-caring attitude towards the atrocities that occur around the world, that he perceives to be as the problem. Chomsky explains that it is our active involvement *in* these atrocities that is most deplorable, such as when Saddam Hussein (then President of Iraq) was attempting genocide on the Kurdish people in 1988. At this time, the US and its allies did nothing to stop the attacks and remained in support of Saddam's regime until their 'interests' were threatened with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This incident of attempted genocide is always cited as one of the primary justifications for the current war, evidence of Saddam as 'evil' and as the 'Beast of Bagdad'. Yet at the time of the Kurdish attack, Saddam was regarded as a friend of the US, George Bush senior in 1990 even sent a delegation headed by Bob Dole (later a Republican Presidential candidate) to "*convey his greetings to his friend Saddam Hussein*", as Chomsky explains, "*they told him how much Bush appreciated his great contributions, and that he should disregard critical comments he is hearing occasionally in the American press*"<sup>25</sup>. And we must remember, that when all other grounds such as weapons of mass destruction and links between Iraq and Al Qaeda had failed, the current War on Iraq was justified by the 'evil' that was Saddam, and the 'hope of democracy' that the US and its allies would bring to the Iraqi people – the same people that were abandoned during the worst atrocities.

But of course, the war on Iraq was always about the control of natural resources, namely the second largest oil fields in the world after Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.80

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.130-131

And it is not just the control of the oil, but of its economic value to American oil companies.<sup>26</sup> Tariq Ali, another historian and political author, claims that:

*The present state of the US is being driven by a type of fear. A fear that they are no longer as dominant economically as they were before, a fear of the rising economic might of China and the Far East. In order to keep them at bay, they are prepared to take risks – military risks to try and hegemonize the world so that when China reaches a totally dominant stage, as they imagine in 20, 25 years' time, they will be heavily dependant on the US for energy resources, etc., which will be de facto under US control. That's the plan.*<sup>27</sup>

Former Australian Defence Minister, Brendan Nelson, recently and inadvertently (to the chagrin of then Prime Minister John Howard) admitted as much in a press conference, despite his Government claiming for years that the Iraq war was never about oil.

*Obviously the Middle East itself, not only Iraq but the entire region, is an important supplier of energy, oil in particular, to the rest of the world... Australians and all of us need to think what would happen if there were a premature withdrawal from Iraq. It's in our interests, our security interests, to make sure that we leave the Middle East, and leave Iraq in particular, in a position of sustainable security.*<sup>28</sup>

So it seems that we, the mass audience (“the successor to ‘the public’”)<sup>29</sup> are being *duped*. The real issues, such as control of natural resources, are continuously *obfuscated* with simplistic ideological name calling, such as the attributing of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ to various parts of the world and their peoples. Chomsky describes how countries such as Iraq and Iran, geographically centred on some of the biggest oil reserves in the world, have variously been described by US Governments over the past fifty years as ‘good’ or ‘evil’, on and off. This attribution is given as ‘good’ when the presiding Governments of

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen R. Shalom, *The United States and the Iran-Iraq War*, Z Magazine, February 1990.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell & Ali (2007)

<sup>28</sup> Brendan Nelson, former Australian Defence Minister, BBC News Online, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6272168.stm> (visited 9.1.08)

<sup>29</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p.22

those countries are co-operating with US oil interests, and 'evil' when they are not; regardless of the human rights records and atrocities that are occurring in those countries, by their regimes, at any given period.

Harold Pinter, renowned British playwright and political activist, also makes powerful comment on these matters, such as in his Nobel Lecture from 2005. In this lecture, titled *Art, Truth and Politics*, Pinter discusses the oppression, atrocities and brutality that occurred in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the post war period, and how this knowledge is commonplace in Western culture and well documented and verified. However, he goes on to point out that "*the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all.*"<sup>30</sup> Pinter goes on to detail the US's involvement with the Contras in Nicaragua as an example of this. He explains his own personal involvement in the delegation speaking on behalf of Nicaragua, where they detailed the atrocities that were occurring under the hand of the Contras, whom the US was funding. The response of the US official was that "*In war, innocent people always suffer.*"<sup>31</sup> He reminds us that President Regan at that time had said: "*The Contras are the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.*"<sup>32</sup> The brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua was supported by the US for forty years. The Sandanistas, leading the Nicaraguan people, overthrew the dictatorship in 1979 and whilst they weren't perfect, Pinter says, they established a descent, pluralistic society, feeding the starving, building 2000 schools, giving families titles to land, eradicating Polio and establishing free health and education etc. Pinter explains how the US "*denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion*"<sup>33</sup> and eventually brought down the Sandanista government. "*The casinos moved back in... free health and free education were over. Big business had returned with a vengeance. 'Democracy' had prevailed*".<sup>34</sup>

*Images of perfection, suntan and napalm*

*Grenada - Haiti - Poland - Nicaragua*

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<sup>30</sup> Harold Pinter, *Art, Truth and Politics: Nobel Lectures from the Literature Laureates 1986 to 2005*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p.5

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9



*Who shall we choose for our morality?  
I'm thinking right now of Hollywood tragedy  
Big Mac; smack; Phoenix, R; please smile y'all  
Cuba, Mexico can't cauterize our discipline  
Your idols speak so much of the abyss  
Yet your morals only run as deep as the surface  
Cool - groovy - morning - fine  
Tipper Gore was a friend of mine  
I love a free country  
The stars and stripes and an apple for mommy  
Conservatives say there ain't no black in the union jack  
Democrats say there ain't enough white in the stars and stripes<sup>35</sup>*

Excerpt from the song:

*If white America told the truth for one day its world would fall apart*  
By Manic Street Preachers 1994

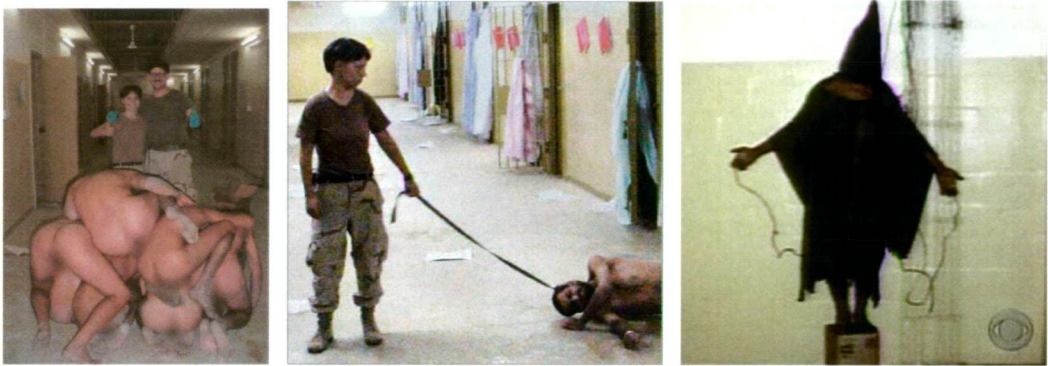
These core concerns, which are touched upon here in order to illustrate a level of engagement, also have a *visual* counterpoint. The interplay of power and the control of natural resources, and its inevitable segregation of 'us' (those with control) and 'them' (the 'other' – without control) are found extensively in the pictorial representations of Western art. Author Stephen F. Eisenman explores the representational codes of torture and cruelty in Western art in his book *The Abu Ghraib Effect*. In it, he proposes a *pathos formulae* – “the representation of collusion between torturer and victim”<sup>36</sup> – reaching back as far as ancient Greece, the purpose of which being to instil a sense of racial superiority in the perpetrators. This was achieved, historically, through pictorially submissive gestures, such as kneeling or standing in a cruciform, and the depiction of the victim in varying states such as being dressed in drag, performing homosexual acts or being treated like an animal – basically the same content as the pictures that were exposed in the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq in 2004 (fig.7). He proposes that our historical and cultural conditioning has created a familiarity with these types of images, and that it is this

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<sup>35</sup> Nicky Wire & Richard James, *If white America told the truth for one day its world would fall apart*, Sony Music Publishing, UK, 1994

<sup>36</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, Reaktion Books, London, 2007, p.97

familiarity that is the reason why the Abu Ghraib images did not elicit the kind of abhorrence in the public that one may have expected. He explores this *pathos formulae*, in both recent and historical times, as often relating to a form of 'humour'; that is, a 'racist joke' "*who's victim is always non-white*"<sup>37</sup>. Eisenman stresses the point that he does not consider the Abu Ghraib pictures as works of art, but that "*the materials and tools of art history are essential to understanding them and countering their effect.*"<sup>38</sup>



(fig.7) Images from the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal.

These ideas, especially in regards to the formal aspects of what Eisenman is describing, are expanded upon in Chapter 3 in relation to specific works. Through the artworks presented in this thesis, I have made efforts to address these matters of concern, specifically through the employment of 'reverse spin' on the idea of a *pathos formulae*, such as in the work *I just Died In Your Arms Tonight* (fig. 8). This work depicts an emotional and distressed Paris Hilton grieving the loss of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein; a stark contrast to the original US Military image (fig. 9). Other works in this project also continuously explore the thematic of the forgiveness of our own transgressions and the punishment of 'others'; indicated by the inclusion of such figures as David Hicks and Saddam Hussein amongst portraits of John Howard, Robin Gray and members of the Australian Wheat Board, in the series titled *Common Ground*.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.97

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.10



(fig.8) *I just Died In Your Arms Tonight*, 2007



(fig.9) The original US Military image of the capture of Saddam.

These contexts that I have introduced inform my art practice; they are central to my *matters of concern*. It is noteworthy to acknowledge, though, that there is obfuscation at work here, a 'fog of war' so to speak. And that is, that these *matters of concern*, however passionately felt and engaged with, are being transmitted to me via a vast and complex mediation; that is, the *media environment*. Although these concerns are occurring in the material world, the empirical world of concrete actions and events, they occur for me in a state of suspended animation, an insubstantial and arbitrary classification of information, arriving through various media such as books, the Internet and newspapers in small, bite-sized chunks. Due to this mediation, my passions become abstracted, my arguments become convoluted, and my convictions become suspicions. It is an environment where 'truth' becomes so ambiguous as to solicit only the most ambivalent response. To quote Chomsky, as he discusses 'speaking truth to power', he states, "*I don't like the phrase 'speak truth to'. We don't know the truth. At least I don't.*"<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it seems a powerless and frustrating situation for the mass audience, and the work produced in this project reflects that. Tariq Ali is a little more positive:

*Follow your instincts. When your instincts tell you there is something corrupt and disgusting about the way the political establishment operates, you're 100 percent right. But don't just say that. Try and do something about it: in the realm of culture, in the realm of protests, in the realm of*

<sup>39</sup> Chomsky (2003) p.108



*literature, in the realm of theatre. Do alternative things, and don't be too scared that if you do that, you won't be able to find a job. It's much easier, with the development of technology today to produce a magazine or a cracking ten-minute documentary. We couldn't do that in the 60's. It's a totally different world, and there are enormous, enormous opportunities which should be used.*<sup>40</sup>

I will conclude this section with a quote from Harold Pinter, and an image of Mark Vaile (fig.10), which adequately sum up my *matters of concern*, those of *duplicity* and *obfuscation* within the political establishment, and which leads to the underlying context of the project, the *location* of those concerns: the *media environment*.

*"Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory (the search for truth) since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed."*<sup>41</sup>



(Fig.10) Mark Vaile, then Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Trade, cringes during the A.W.B. Scandal, 2006, where he 'forgot' all details regarding the dealings of the AWB with Iraq.

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<sup>40</sup> Campbell & Ali (2007)

<sup>41</sup> Pinter (2006) p.5

## Section Two – The Medium is the Message

*All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments. All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical.* <sup>42</sup>

In this quote, Marshall MacLuhan concisely lays down the foundations for the central context of this thesis – *media*. It is impossible for me to separate out any other context, including those mentioned above, whether they are of a political, military, dissenting, or stylistic nature, without acknowledging how connected and reliant upon media that each context is. Media has profoundly touched, affected and altered the way I perceive the world, and in turn shapes the way I translate this perception, my experience of reality, into art. What's more, this project, over its duration, has increasingly become a deliberate engagement with a *mediated reality*, which is located everywhere at once, all of the time. So, as set out in my central argument I have visually explored ideas of *duplicity* and *obfuscation* as relating to my *matters of concern*, employing the formal device of the *political figure* as the *vehicle* for this exploration and, as indicated, the *underlying* context of this project is *media environment* itself.

In his 1967 book *The Medium is the Message*, Marshall MacLuhan develops a strikingly prescient and insightful discourse about media, where he states that “Art, or the graphic translation of a culture, is shaped by the way space is perceived.”<sup>43</sup> He describes this perception of space as being governed by the predominant media of any given period, from the advent of the alphabet, which led to the ordering and rationalisation of the perceived world into words and numbers (hence buildings, bureaucracies, civilization), through to printing presses and mechanization (a catalyst for those concerns that were to

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<sup>42</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p. 26

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 57

be labelled modernist) and finally to the new, electronic media of the present and how it is returning us to a more connected, *global village*.<sup>44</sup> He describes this *global village* as a horizon-less place with no fixed centre that is everywhere at once and to which we are intimately and inevitably connected. This is an apt description of the *Internet*, let alone media in its entirety, from the printed word through to jet propulsion. MacLuhan proposes that this new media is returning us to something more akin with our tribal origins; and by this he means the way in which pre-historical or tribal societies perceive the world as layers of what is *known* (as opposed to what is *seen*), and where the *depicted* world is a visual layering of this knowledge, akin to the x-ray like drawings of Australian Aboriginals (fig.11).



(fig.11) Australian Aboriginal 'x-ray' art

He contrasts this with the perceptive realist view of recent and historical western culture, where the *depicted* world is everything that is *seen*, and therefore rationalised to be true. And although MacLuhan proposes a *new media environment*, that of the electrically configured *global village*, all of the previous paradigms of media have been brought forward into this new reality; the *image*, the *word*, and the *machine*. So it is not so much a replacement, as it is an *evolution*.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.67





(fig.12) Various advertising in magazines selling products such as perfume, beer and personal music players

This *perception of space* in Western culture, that of relating rational *truth* to that which can be *seen*, goes a long way in explaining our reticence to acknowledge our transgressions; that is, if those transgressions are kept from our sight (which they are) we cannot acknowledge the truth of *their* existence. However, if we are shown images of the transgressions of 'other' (which we are, constantly) we accept the authority of those images as *proof*, and therefore can justify the punishment, however harsh, of the perpetrator. It is interesting to note, and here I digress, that in Islamic culture, *perceptive realist* art forms are prohibited. Therefore Islamic art employs the use of patterns, symbols and the emblematic to construct visual worlds of what is *known* as truth in that culture, as opposed to that which is *seen* as truth. This could be interpreted in a very visual and obvious sense in the *Hijab*, the

mechanisation, that were approaching new ways of understanding the medium and interrogating its significance, across a variety of artistic methodologies such as prose, writing, art, performance, happenings, photomontage and so on. They did this primarily through the device of *paradox* – an assertion of ‘nothing’; that is, that meaning is essentially arbitrary and that truth is not absolute. With this attitude, they were able to reconfigure the material world, within their artwork, to reveal ‘new realities’.



(fig.15) John Heartfield, *ADOLF THE SUPERMAN*, 1932



(fig.16) Hannah Hoch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the First Epoch of the Weimar Beer-Belly Culture*, 1919



(fig.17) Raoul Hausmann, *The Art Critic*, 1920

I think that Dada was/is probably the most significant development in modernist art; in that its concerns, and the implications of those concerns, are still being explored today – namely under the guise of ‘post-modernism’. It would seem that every modernist movement that followed, and certainly post-modernism itself, have been investigating *facets* or *extensions* of Dada. Dadaist Hans Richter claimed in 1965 that Pop Art is Dada<sup>53</sup>, and another Dadaist, Tristan Tzara, in the 1920’s declared, “*Dada is the ensign of abstraction.*”<sup>54</sup> Sociologist David Locher makes a convincing argument that Post-Modernism (as espoused by its main proponents Baudrillard and Lyotard) is merely a revision of Dada. He claims that both movements assert that “meaning is arbitrary, relative and subjective”<sup>55</sup> and that, in a discussion of language

<sup>53</sup> Hans Richter, *DADA: art and anti-art*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965, p.213

<sup>54</sup> Marc Dachev, *Dada: the Revolt of Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p.13

<sup>55</sup> David Locher, *Unacknowledged Roots and Blatant Imitation: Postmodernism and the Dada Movement*, Electronic Journal of Sociology, 1999.



(which we could interpret here as visual language), they both believe that language signifies nothing (is its own reality), and that what is *referred* to as 'reality' is unknowable, and that "we live in the illusion that we are in touch with it"<sup>56</sup>. As claimed by Tzara, Dada never rested on a particular theory; it "*places doubt above everything*"<sup>57</sup> and "*was nothing but a protest*"<sup>58</sup>. Eric D. Weitz says that Dada "*is ideals, knowledge, and nonsense, a rejection of the family, sexual prudishness, logic, memory and archaeology. It celebrates spontaneity and folly*"<sup>59</sup> – this sounds like the 'post-modern' world, especially contemporary pop culture; that is, the *media environment*. My thoughts on this are that the Dadaists witnessed the birth of the *new media environment* (mechanisation, instant communication), and that the Post-Modernists have sought to interpret the *mid-point* of its development as its *fruition* (television, electronic circuitry, information technology). To me, a *truly* 'post-modernist' period is yet to occur, or rather is occurring *now*, with the rise of the *new media environment* of the *virtual*, the Internet. The Internet is the *site* in which Dada and Post-Modernism can *occur* for the *mass audience* (as opposed to being proposed or philosophised by artists and theoreticians) where reality *is* illusion, where meaning *is* arbitrary, relative and subjective, and where the experiencing of life *is* a self-reflexive activity.<sup>60</sup> And in the same way that Hans Arp was (rightly) concerned that the "*establishment would use visual art as a way of creating a particular version of reality*"<sup>61</sup> (which the Pop Artists later drew attention to), I am concerned that the establishment will (and do) use the Internet to create another, particular version of reality. Arp's hope for art at that time was that it should be participated in, not simply looked at; which is my hope for the Internet, for the Virtual: that through participation, a shared version of reality can be created, rather than another mind-deadening, opiate of the masses.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Locher (1999)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Dachev (2005) p. 117

<sup>59</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 285

<sup>60</sup> Locher (1999) makes the case that perhaps the most significant tie between Dada and Post-Modernism "is the intensely self-reflective activity" that is the characterisation of many of their proponents.

<sup>61</sup> Locher (1999)

<sup>62</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St Louis, MO: Telos, 1981, pp.169-177

Islamic headscarf worn by most Islamic women. In the West we perceive this tradition as barbaric, demeaning, weird and 'just not right'. It is an essentially racist view, and yet it is a view that is so pervasive and widely accepted. It could be, and here I postulate, that there is a certain awareness in Islamic culture of what is *known*, of what the scarf conceals; where as in Western culture we need to see, almost to the point of turning every representation of the female form into something explicitly pornographic (fig.12). Here again is the forgiveness, or the inability to perceive, our own transgression (in this case a racial or cultural superiority), and the metering out of punishment for the transgressions of the 'other'.

In his 1995 book, *Art & Social Structure*, Robert W. Witkin engages in a similar discourse about the relationship of art to social structure. Witkin's approach is more academic, if not a little drier than MacLuhan, as he engages with what he terms a 'grand version' of the sociology of art, where he aims to look at "*the complex relation of the artist to the total historical situation in particular to the traditions of representations available to him or her.*"<sup>45</sup> Similarly to MacLuhan, Witkin describes the "*key to understanding*" the relationship between art and social structure as a "*link between a way of picturing and a way of seeing.*"<sup>46</sup> These points are especially important to any project that places media as a central context, as media (the key vehicle of ways of seeing) itself is in a period of immense change. We are in the process of evolving one *whole way of seeing* and therefore of *picturing*, into another. In this new *media environment*, Witkin proposes that our ways of picturing are "*intimately bound up with the pursuit of a qualitative experience of reality, an ordering of experience that is 'value-rich'*"<sup>47</sup> or as MacLuhan describes it: "*Electric circuitry is recreating in us the multi-dimensional space orientation of the primitive.*"<sup>48</sup>

This evolving *media environment* is shaping our way of perceiving the world, asking us to reconsider how we *understand* the world. Art, or graphic culture, is exploring these new understandings and perceptions. It has been suggested

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<sup>45</sup> Witkin (1995) p.8 – Here Witkin quotes Tim Clark. He also distinguishes this 'grand version' from a 'contextualised version' (of which Clark was a devotee), which he describes as one that looks closely at each work an artist produces and the significance of those works to a very specific and localised social context.

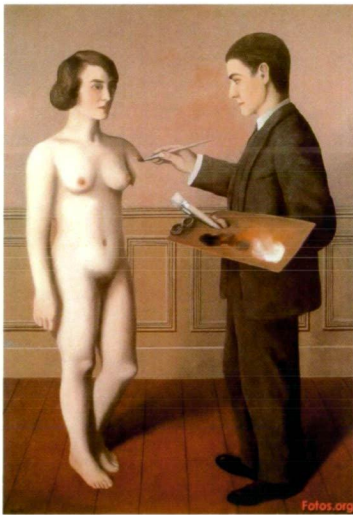
<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.62

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.187

<sup>48</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p.56

by both MacLuhan and Witkin that the devices of *paradox* and *irony* are the keys to developing new understandings of the new media. Witkin lucidly describes the *ironic* mode through a discussion of the modernist painter Magritte (figs.13-14).

*"This love of the paradox was not merely capricious. It was motivated by a profound distrust of all non-paradoxical assertions about reality. Such assertions are always the product of a limited and partial experience. The most common-sense, taken-for-granted boundaries around experience were to be transcended. How could this be done other than through a relentless subversion? But this process of subversion, so negating in respect of common sense understandings, was always aimed at the achievement of higher understanding"*<sup>49</sup>



(fig.13) Rene Magritte, *Attempting the Impossible*, 1928



(fig.14) Rene Magritte, *The Treachery of Images* (*La trahison des images*), 1928

And from MacLuhan we hear:

*"Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories – for probing around. When two seemingly disparate elements are imaginatively poised, put in apposition in new and unique ways, startling discoveries often result."*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Witkin (1994) p.184

<sup>50</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p.10

*"Humour, as a system of communications and as a probe of our environment – of what's really going on – does not deal in theory but in immediate experience, and is often the best guide to changing perceptions. Older societies thrived on purely literary plots. They demanded story lines. Today's humour, on the contrary, has no story line – no sequence. It is usually a compressed overlay of stories."*<sup>51</sup>

So how does this new media environment, especially the Internet, shape our ways of seeing? In turn, how do these new ways of seeing affect art and graphic culture? Obviously the rise of hybrid arts and hybrid media is one effect. Another possible interpretation is to look at the rise of 'maximalism' within those hybrid media, and within painting and graphic design, where layers of icon, symbol, figure, ground and text are layered upon each other in juxtaposition and pastiche – creating vivid and chaotic reflections of the new environment. What strikes me as even more pertinent than this hybridity or 'maximalism', however, is the *ironic* mode employed by many contemporary artists in their work. This *ironic mode*, or engagement with paradox, is being employed in the way in which both MacLuhan and Witkin have discussed: as a way to arrive at *new understandings in a situation where little is understood*. As MacLuhan points out:

*"The groundrules, pervasive structure, and over-all patterns of environments elude easy perception. Anti-environments, or countersituations made by artists, provide means of direct attention and enable us to see more clearly."*<sup>52</sup>

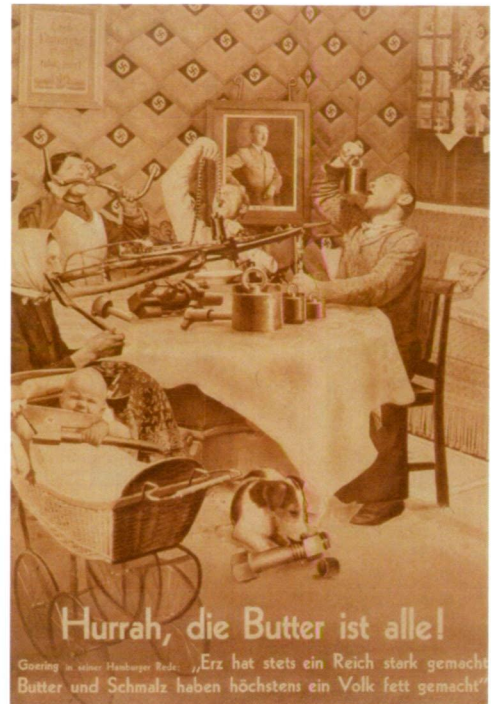
This 'style' of art, or multi-perspective anti-environments, has its origins in both Cubism and Dada, most notably that of the photomontage work of John Heartfield, Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann (figs.15-17). Dada emerged in 1916 when emergent technologies such as the radio and the aeroplane were combining with the then recently established mediums of mechanised printing and photography, to signal the advent of the *new media environment*. It was the Dadaists at the very inception of this *new media environment*, primarily

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.92

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.68





(fig.18) John Heartfield, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute (Millions Stand Behind Me!)*, 1932

(fig.19) John Heartfield, *Hurray, The Butter is Finished!*, 1935

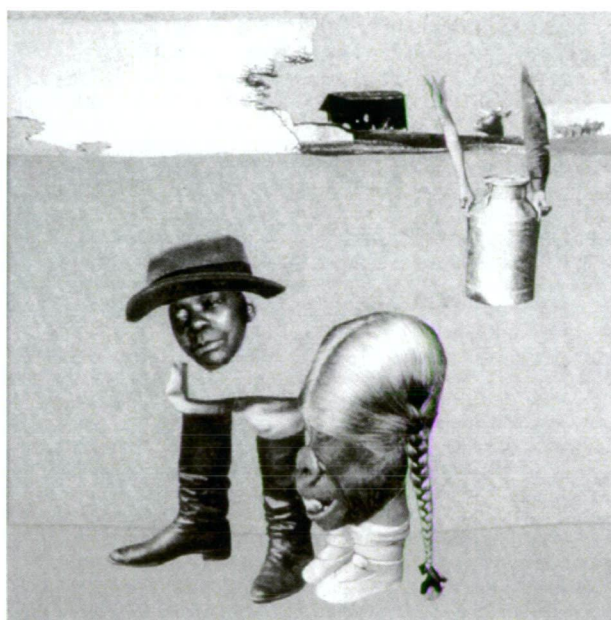
The photomontages of German artists Heartfield and Höch, as protests and as aesthetic interrogations of media, are particularly relevant to this project. They both employ the found media image and reconfigure those images into 'new realities', which is the same process by which I generate my art, boldly asserting the "impermanence of things"<sup>63</sup>. Heartfield was also engaged with counter-propaganda; possibly more accurately, he was countering Nazi propaganda through the tactical employment of *reverse-spin*. To disseminate his material, he produced political posters (which I equate with street art) and produced images for the covers of news journals, specifically *AIZ* (fig.18) (which I would equate with an Internet blog, the contemporary equivalent of a printed news journal). In the work *Hurray, the Butter is Finished!* (fig.19), we witness a parody of propaganda aesthetics, with a German family sitting around a table consuming metal parts, and the ironic statement: "*Iron has always made a nation strong, butter and lard have only made the people fat*", which again is a parody of the types of nationalistic slogans espoused by Hitler (whose portrait hangs on the dining room wall). For Heartfield the use of text and image was essential, for their ability to interact and counterpoint each

<sup>63</sup> Weitz (2007) p.285

other in the same way as multiple images, and I have employed a similar device, though more often than not in the titling of works. At the time he was making these photomontages, Heartfield was not recognised as a 'fine artist', in fact it was some years later and after his death before the first major exhibition of his works was held, at the TATE Britain in 2005. During his career as a designer and artist, Heartfield was most concerned about the message of his works, rather than say, some of the Cubists and Futurists who, according to Tzara, were primarily concerned with a technical or intellectual perfection.<sup>64</sup>



(fig.20) Hannah Höch, *Dada-Ernst*, 1920-21



(fig.21) Hannah Höch, *Peasant Wedding Couple*, 1931

Hannah Höch's methodologies were much the same as Heartfield's, yet her works from the early 1920's contained a greater sense of optimism about the new media. Where Heartfield's works were 'message' driven and explicitly political, Höch explored the possibilities of the new media and its potential for a better world, a celebration and a critique at once. Her works, such as *Dada-Ernst* (fig.20), were chaotic and layered, filled with images of athletes, skyscrapers and movie stars. Höch's critique was mostly concerned with the depiction of woman as commodity in the mass media and advertising – witness here the gold coins surreptitiously placed at the apex of spreading

<sup>64</sup> Dachy (2005) p.117



legs. Later, Höch's works were to explore this media as the "*fearsome monster that fragments and destroys, rather than as the joyful liberator*".<sup>65</sup> Through parody and the juxtaposition of found images of mixed race and gender, she exposed and deconstructed media contrivances of beauty and identity, proposing a far more unstable view of racial and gender identities than those prevailing in Western attitudes of the 1920's. This is especially evident in *Peasant Couple Wedding* (fig.21), a stark challenge to conservative Germany that depicts the marriage of a blonde German girl (as gorilla) to an African man. The urgency in the work of both Höch and Heartfield is no doubt a sign of the extreme times they were living in: of war, emergent technologies, shifting values and revolution.

*"Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience co-exist in a state of active interplay."*<sup>66</sup> Marshall MacLuhan

This mode of working, that engages with pattern recognition and non-linear assemblage (as employed by Höch and Heartfield amongst others) is evident in the work of many contemporary artists. Ben Frost, a young Australian artist, employs imagery sourced from popular culture, layering these images in a 'splice-and-dice' manner. Pornography, brand logos, colloquialisms and quotes jostle for attention in his work, such as in *K-mart after dark* (fig.22). Frost employs techniques synonymous with those of the 'street'; paste-ups, stencils, spray paint and markers. His work is certainly ironic and dissonant, yet somehow cohesive and for the most part strangely non-challenging. In one glance at *This is Sinerama* (fig.23) it is possible to take in Ronald McDonald, an erect penis, Bambi giving birth to mini-Bambis through the anus, Pluto mating with Fido and the words *Love* and *Johnny Cash*. And it all seems Okay! It seems impossible to be shocked, if that was the intention, because what is depicted here *is* the media environment that we encounter in everyday experience, to a greater or lesser degree. So what actually becomes explicit in

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<sup>65</sup> Weitz (2007) p.289

<sup>66</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p.63

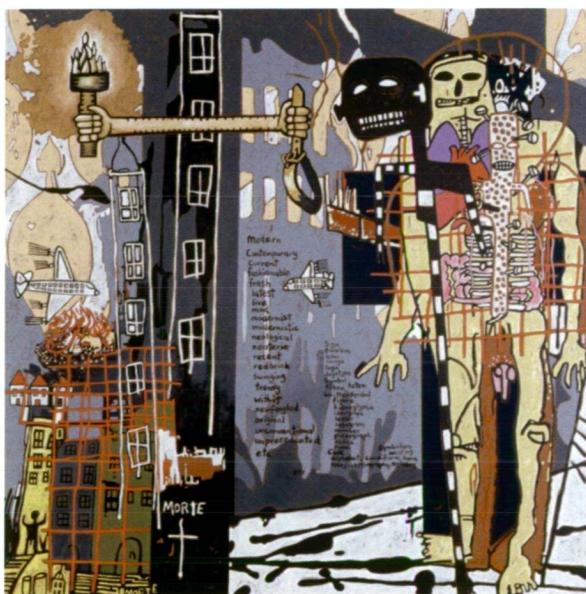
his work is the *pattern recognition*, a deconstruction of the way media presents itself in an endlessly repeating cycle of certain motifs such as sex, violence, love, hate, adult, kid and on and on, all competing for our attention, one always trying to outdo the other. That Frost's work is a construction of media images, that affect us in the same way that the media *itself* affects us, is the irony, and in this sense it exposes the artifice, and enables new understanding. And by this I mean that through the act of *seeing* Frost's work, we can accept the 'truth' of what is *signified* more clearly than through *seeing* the presentations of the *media environment*, such as advertising and Hollywood.



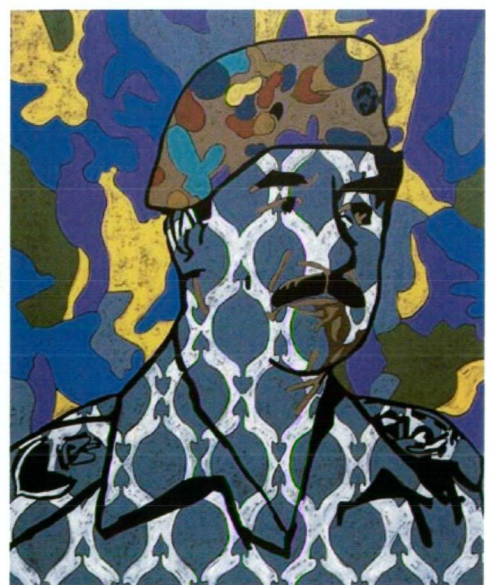
(fig.22) Ben Frost, *kmart after dark*, 2005



(fig.23) Ben Frost, *This is Sinerama*, 2007



(fig.24) Gordon Bennett, *Notes to Basquiat (the coming of the light)*, 2001



(fig.25) Gordon Bennett, *Camouflage #7*, 2003



In Gordon Bennett's *Notes to Basquiat* series (fig.24), we are also confronted by a non linear assemblage, as well as further references to the 'street' though Bennett's visual quoting of Basquiat. In Bennett's work the figures rival the scale of the buildings, revealing organs and bones and a multiplicity of angles and selves. The word *Morte* (death) is preceded by a list beginning with *Modern, contemporary, current, fashionable...* etc. juxtaposed with planes crashing into the twin towers and a pair of hands holding the torch of liberty on one side and a noose on the other.

What is most interesting for me about Bennett's work is the artist's own *hybridity*, his genetic and visual connections to the traditions of both European and Aboriginal Australia (of which, the latter he only discovered later in life). This hybridity extends to formal and contextual elements, and is a recurring and dominant thematic throughout all of his work. This creates an inherent tension, a paradox and a struggle that is more profound in its emotive effect on the viewer than, say, the work of Frost. There is uneasiness in viewing Bennett's work<sup>67</sup>, which is conducive to achieving new insights into his *matters of concern*. I would ascribe this to the fact that Bennett employs's deeply personal, subjective and sensuous representations of his inner, symbolic world to describe the objective, empirical world of events and issues. This is in contrast to Frost, who employs *matters of fact*, that is, representations from the empirical world; to essentially redescribe that world, leaving the viewer somewhat emotionally untouched. Bennett also employs the device of *camouflage*, as depicted in *Camouflage #7* (fig.25), in relation to his concerns about the Iraq war and the perceived ambivalence of the Australian people towards their involvement.

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<sup>67</sup> I had the opportunity to view Bennett's work at the NGV, Melbourne, in August 2007



(fig.26) Elizabeth Daniels, *Shepard Fairey*, date undisclosed



(fig.27) Shepard Fairey, *OBEY Posters*, date and location unknown

Shepard Fairey, credited as the 'father of Street Art', is most famous for his 'OBEY' propaganda posters (figs.26-27), illegally pasted on buildings and other infrastructure all over the United States and beyond. He is a technically masterful screen printer, illustrator, designer and stencil artist who employs a hybrid of these techniques in his work. In more recent times his works have taken on a far more complex and layered aesthetic than the original OBEY posters.



(fig.28) Shepard Fairey, *Toxic Dept* installation, 2007 (detail on right)

In *Toxic Dept.* (fig.28), we are confronted by layers and layers of pattern, figure, symbol and found images. Like Heartfield, Fairey is 'message' driven,

his works continuously exploring themes of war, protest and revolution; and like Höch, Fairey's works aspire to a positivism, the possibility of a better world, made evident through his employment of the rose and the peace symbol throughout his works. What I find most interesting about Fairey's work is his unashamedly commercial intent, employing the strategies of branding, advertising and propaganda itself to disseminate his work. It is through this process that he deconstructs the contrivances of US state propaganda and its *covert* commercial intent, i.e. the use of war to generate economic activity, and the employment of ideological propaganda such as '*the axis of evil*' to covertly secure American commercial oil interests. Fairey, however, is overt in his intent, often exposing his process in explanatory texts within his works.

Across all of these works and artists we have a layering of icon, figure and text, a variety of source material and contexts – a sense of everything happening at once. In fact, it is the *media environment* that is the *signified* in all of these works, despite the various *signifiers* and *referents*. There is also the *sensuous* and *subjective* in these works, the artist coming to terms with the environment *in which they experience*, and the *multiplicity* of selves that do the experiencing – trying to find some kind of meaningful *coherence*. I construe the ironic and paradoxical mode of operation of these artists as a relationship between their individual *subjective experiences* of the mediated environment, the complex and *schizophrenic*<sup>68</sup> nature of this environment, and its *duplicitous* and *ambiguous* content. These are essentially modernist concerns, Dadaist concerns, transposed onto what we term *post-modern* society, or rather, we are *still seeking ways to come to grips with what modernism proposed*, of coming to grips with the *old ways of seeing* let alone the *new*. This could be ascribed to the acceleration of changes in the media environment, after all, we had tens-of-thousands of years to develop our relationship with the *image*, thousands of years with the *word*, and yet only about one-hundred years to develop a relationship with *mechanization*, *electronics*, *instant communication*, *jet propulsion* and now the *virtual*. We no longer have the luxury of spending hundreds of years exploring the intricacies of a new media form and its impact. New media and new technology become a part of the *everyday* the

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<sup>68</sup> These ideas of multiplicity of selves and schizophrenic society are attributed to: R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965

*moment they hit the shelves!*

The essential point here is that any visual language engaged in dissent and critical opinion is ultimately engaged with critiquing media itself; the symbols and representations employed merely become easily recognisable *referents* by which a dialogue or discourse can occur. Appropriation of the everyday, in this case the media image, provides a wealth of accessible and easily recognisable *referents*. This is a dialogue *with* media that creates new meanings and realities, through juxtaposition and paradox, which leads to new understandings *of* that media.

*"Our time presents a unique opportunity for learning by means of humour – a perceptive or incisive joke can be more meaningful than platitudes lying between two covers"*<sup>69</sup>

## **The Political Landscape**

*"One of the earliest functions of the pure landscape picture seems to have been to provide evidence of ownership, like an entry in a land register."*<sup>70</sup>

Martin Warnke, author of the book *The Political Landscape*, discusses the literal terms of *political landscape*; how the concept of 'landscape' is a construct that man has employed to indicate ownership and subjugation of nature. It is used separately from the concept of nature as nature. He proposes nature as an 'argumentative force' and an 'autonomous authority' that has guided human actions throughout history, and that human actions have in turn created the 'landscape'. At the end of his book he concludes, somewhat sadly, that:

*"Man's devastating exploitation of nature has put an end to her argumentative force and autonomous authority. Permeated by foreign substances and marked out for destruction, she may still elicit sympathy and inspire relief measures, but she can no longer assist us by furnishing arguments for legitimacy. The rich reservoir of*

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<sup>69</sup> MacLuhan (1967) p.10

<sup>70</sup> Warnke (1994) p. 53



*motifs and experiences that once guided human action, and that I have tried to record here <in this book>, has run dry.*"<sup>71</sup>

It is in this sense that I propose that an alternative method of picturing the 'landscape' is possible through the representation of the political and business figures that *control* that 'landscape'.<sup>72</sup> It is not a far stretch then, to replace 'nature' with 'landscape', 'landscape' with 'figure', and 'figure' with 'power' or 'control'. This proposition is made more acute in a micro-political environment such as Tasmania. In all three major bodies of work, I have engaged with this representation of 'figure' as 'landscape'. This proposition is exemplified in the 1934 fresco painting *Man, Controller of the Universe* (fig.29) by Mexican artist Diego Rivera. In this work the landscape is completely covered by the figure, the only representations of 'nature' being some small, subordinate growths at the bottom, seeded and controlled by man. On the left (or the central figure's right) are the fascists, and on the right (left) are the communists. This is an uncompromising work, powerful and explicit in its concerns. The machines, the gigantic sculptures of 'man', the armies, the controlling 'hand' in the centre... all of this is subverted by the expression on the face of the central figure. He is anxious, he is worried, he is under enormous pressure, he is in 'control' – and yet he is *not in control*.



(fig.29) Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.146

<sup>72</sup> This alternative method is illustrated most clearly in the body of work "*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*", detailed in Chapter 3

## The 'Street'

All of the artists mentioned so far have had some element of connection in their work to the 'street'. So is there a connection between the 'street', visual culture and the new media environment? Christine Dew makes the connection in her book *Uncommissioned Art*, where she says:

*"The unpredictable, public and anonymous conversations of graffiti, like those crackling old (crossed) telephone lines, have prepared us for the internet chat room, where anonymous strangers using pseudonyms come and go, contribute or observe, and return or not, staying for as long or as little as they wish. Graffiti tells us that humans have long reached out to strangers in this random and unpredictable fashion. Graffiti space is the prototype of virtual space."*<sup>73</sup>

In addition to this, the 'street' could be used to exemplify what MacLuhan described as "moving from data classification to pattern recognition" and non-linear construction. That is, that the 'street' is a *site* in which irony and paradox can occur in a seemingly arbitrary fashion, somewhat akin to *Fluxus*, in both the relationship of one image or text to another, and in relationship of those images and texts with *place*. The laneways of Melbourne are a fine example of this phenomenon in action (fig.30). This build up of images and text occurs over time, with a range of contributors, all expressing different matters of concern and employing different *referents*. There is often little consideration when preparing that stencil or idea as to how it will interact with other artwork placed on whichever wall they end up contributing to. It is somewhat akin to a collective *automatic*<sup>74</sup> imaging process.

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<sup>73</sup> Christine Dew, *Uncommissioned Art: an A-Z of Australian Graffiti*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007, p. 226

<sup>74</sup> By this I mean *automatic* in the Surrealist sense, that of *stream-of-consciousness* and *random association*.





(fig.30) Stencil Art in a Melbourne Laneway, circa. 2005, photographer unknown

Throughout the course of this research I have made significant contact with the main protagonists and organisational elements of what I will describe here as the Australian sector of a global *Street Art Movement*<sup>75</sup>. Due to the infancy of this movement, I will not in any great detail attempt to qualify or justify my ascribing of the word *movement* to this sub-culture. (That would most likely be a research paper in itself). Suffice to say, for the purpose of this context, that there are hundreds of books and websites detailing thousands of artists engaged with literally millions of actual works and images of street art. In its contemporary form, the bulk of this activity has only occurred in the years proceeding 2000, and gained momentum since around 2004. The principle form, or signifier, of this activity has been the *stencil*. There are historical precedents to the stencil, such as cave art, political anti-establishment propaganda in Spain and France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Blek le Rat in the 80's etc., although here I am discussing only it's most contemporary form. What I find most intriguing about *street art*, is that for the vast majority of the mass audience and the artists themselves, *street art* occurs *within* the media; specifically, *in* the Internet. This is essentially the same process that I have described for politics occurring *in* the media. In fact, if it weren't for the Internet providing the ability for artists around the world to communicate and share their activities, would there be a global *Street Art Movement* at all? I

<sup>75</sup> For the sake of clarification, I employ the term 'street art' as an indicator of 'graffiti' that concerns itself with the *referent* (what is depicted) and the *signified* (the message or concept that the *referent* represents) more than with the *signifier* (the tag itself), which is the traditional understanding of written graffiti, a 'tag'.

would say not, with the exception of a *localised* version happening in some world city or another.

In turn, the stylistic offshoots of 'street art' (into which context one could place my own studio artwork) have become *signifiers* of that movement. The stencil itself has now become a *signifier* of dissent and critical opinion. We read that into a stencil even if there is no dissenting or critical intent by the artist. By the same token, these signifiers are employed by companies and individuals to *commercialise* dissent (i.e. the stencil-like image of Che Guevara). There is a popular opinion that when this happens – that is, the commercialisation or popularisation of a dissenting medium – it somehow weakens or dissolves any inherent power for change in that medium, and on this I would disagree. Art movements can act as catalysts for social change. This is not necessarily achieved through radical confrontation, but through a process of *osmosis* into mainstream society, and it is this process that I have just outlined; that of 'selling out' or popularisation. When a dissenting sub-culture becomes subsumed by the mainstream (which seems inevitable) there is a slight, sometimes imperceptible, shift in the trajectory of that mainstream culture in order to accommodate the newly subsumed sub-culture, and the ideas that it contains. We can see evidence for this in the Dada movement of the 20's in Europe, the Hippy movement of the 60's in America, the Punk movement of the 70's in the UK, and more recently in the Hip Hop movement in America, all of which have altered the trajectory of society, despite their later failings or dissolution. To apply this idea to the movement of 'street art', we can see evidence of its *osmosis* into mainstream culture. We bear witness to numerous government funded 'graffiti' projects (CityLights in Melbourne, council sponsored workshops, decriminalisation in targeted areas)<sup>76</sup>, to fashion and music industry usage of graffiti laneways in photo shoots, to the plethora of published books celebrating the culture, videos and documentaries, video games, accessories and massive prices on artworks by the movements main proponents (Banksy, Sheppard Fairey et al.). What started as an underground and anti-establishment sub-culture is quickly

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<sup>76</sup> And I would add to this list the 'Across Project' initiated by myself, supported by Arts Tasmania funding, to develop a 'street' billboard project for the Hobart waterfront area commencing in October 2008. I have also been involved in numerous government and community projects in support of 'street art' and stencilling, as outlined in Appendix I: c).



becoming a part of the everyday experience of mainstream society. This phenomenon *must* necessitate a shift *in* that mainstream society in order to accommodate this new element. In this sense, I would refer to 'street art' as having an *effect* on social change.



A street work by artist 'Banksy' in Bristol resulted in the Local Council polling the public about whether they considered the work to be 'graffiti vandalism' or 'a work of art':

*"His saucy stencil, which can be found on a building at the bottom of Park Street, was at the centre of a debate about whether his work should be kept as a piece of modern art, or should be removed as a piece of vandalism. Bristolians have voted that Banksy's graffiti should be allowed to stay. Why not visit and judge for yourself! You can see the work from the bridge at the bottom of Park Street."*<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Image and text sourced from the "Visit Bristol" Official website: <http://visitbristol.co.uk/site/guide-book/banksy-graffiti-artist> (visited 17.01.08)

## Section Three – Three Contemporary Local Artists

### Geoff Parr

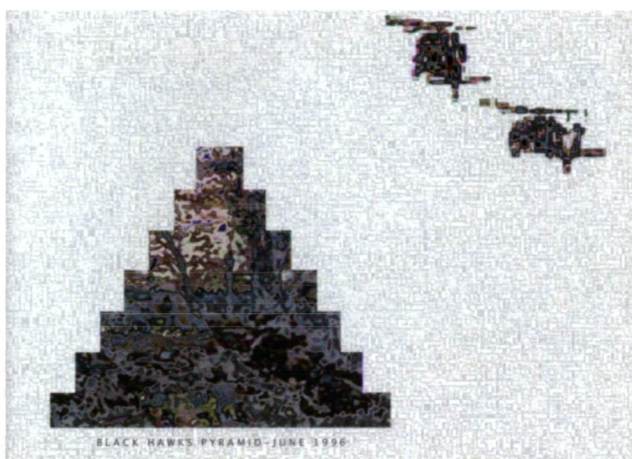
I have encountered Geoff Parr's more recent work in galleries and have been aware of his earlier practice for some years; however, it was not until a retrospective exhibition at the Carnegie Gallery in Hobart, 2006, that I truly connected with Parr's work and gained an insight into the importance of not only political or 'issues based' art work, but the importance of *the local* as a sight for meaningful interaction with the public. This exhibition, *Periscope: A view from the original Lake Padder*, led me to consider how issues-based artwork can relate to the *local*; in this case, Tasmania. It is one thing to make work that engages with global issues such as terrorism and war, but to display that work in a Tasmanian gallery is somewhat dissonant. The experience of war and terror to most Tasmanian's is a remote and disconnected subject. If one were to mention forestry, the environment or local politics, however, most Tasmanian's would have (strong) opinions on the matter. This led me to consider my own work, and the near-absence of the *local* within it (at that time). Parr's work illustrates how the importance of local issues to a community can offer an entry point to dialogue (through visual language) with that community. This also ties in with my stated intention to develop a visual language that is *accessible* to a broad, non-specialist audience.



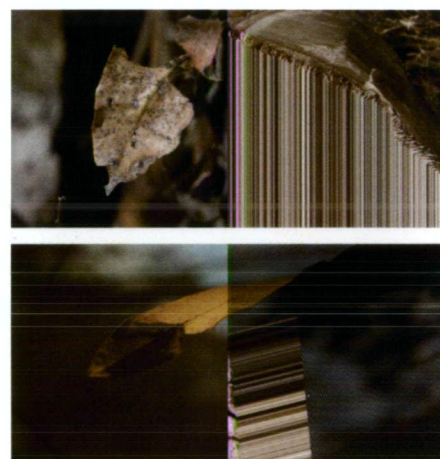
(fig.31) Geoff Parr, *Place II*, 1983/88 (two images from a series of six)



In the work *Place II* (fig.31), we witness a series of visual protests. What is most interesting for me in these works is that Parr places himself *within* the landscape. This relates to the idea of *political landscape* as introduced earlier in this chapter. In this series of works, Parr confronts colonialism, the destruction of wilderness, the extinction of species and the human subjugation of nature in general. It is a biting critique of the short, yet ultimately destructive, history of European settlement in Tasmania. Parr placing himself in these works cements the idea of *human action* as being the true face of *landscape*. Dressed in a suit that signifies his heritage, Parr prepares to hang himself in the last image, noose and hood in place, his figure juxtaposed with a diagram of the colonial fate of the Aboriginal population – that of extermination, subjugation and assimilation.



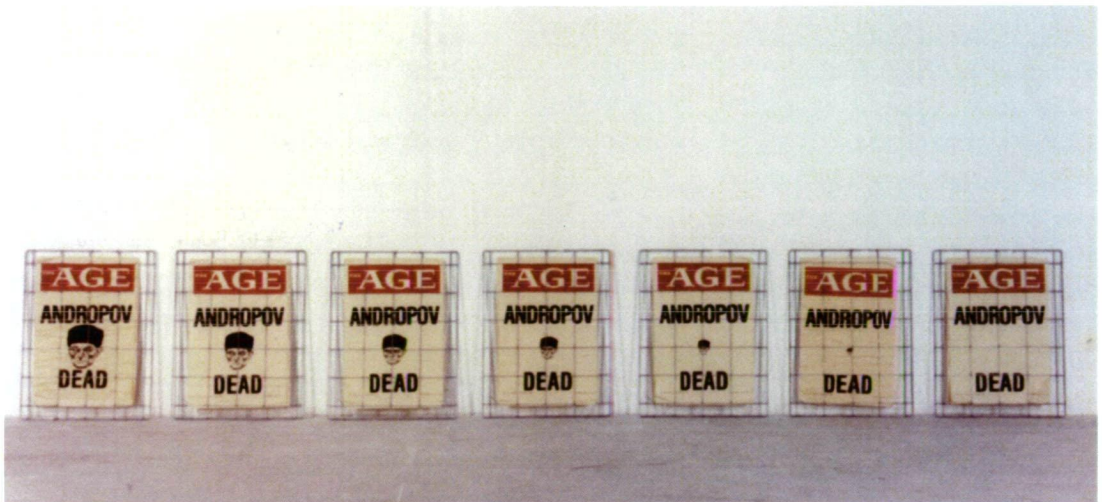
(fig.32) Geoff Parr, *Black Hawks Pyramid*, 1996



(fig.33) Geoff Parr, *Blue Tier Muse*, 2006

Geoff Parr also engages with global issues within his artwork, over the years addressing such events as the first and second Gulf Wars and the Chinese Government's massacre of students at Tiananmen Square in 1989. So I would say that Parr is an artist that is strongly engaged with his *matters of concern*. In addition to making 'issues-based' work, Parr often addresses the *media environment* through his visual language. He accomplishes this in a formal sense (*form as content*) through the employment of *pixelisation* in his work; that is, those media artefacts that can indicate a *mediated* experience. He applies this *pixelisation* to work that addresses issues as diverse as war and the natural environment (fig.32-33), indicating the remote and *mediated* way in

which the *mass audience* experience these things. He occasionally makes direct reference to media processes, such as in the work *Age* (fig.34) where he depicts Andropov, a now unknown yet at the time powerful Russian figure who headed the KGB, appearing in a series of screen printed newspaper headlines. The work depicts Andropov's face writ large in the first frame, gradually diminishing until vanishing point. For me, this work discusses the impermanence of 'the news', what is big news one day is obscure and forgotten the next, and also illustrates how the use of 'headlines' and other shocking tactics by the mass media have no real, lasting impact – they are empty. In this work, Parr deconstructs and exposes the pretensions of media methodologies (including advertising), assisting us in understanding the *media environment*.



(fig.34) Geoff Parr, *Age*, 1984

*"Art constantly refutes those who set guidelines, so I have to first use the phrase "in a general sense" [when referring to art's capacity to effect political change]... Current issues are more likely to produce one-off concepts rather than sustaining a practice. This latter work is more likely to develop around a theme or broad area, such as human response to wild nature"*<sup>78</sup> Geoff Parr

In agreement with Parr, I would add that a contemporary phenomenon is the increasingly systemic nature of matters of concern. Whilst we could make a

<sup>78</sup> Quote by Geoff Parr from catalogue essay by Jonathan Holmes, *Sense of Place: Art in Tasmania, 1970-2005*, Hobart: University of Tasmania, 2006, p. 10

comparison of the Lake Pedder or Franklin River protests of the 1970's and 1980's to that of the Pulp Mill protests now in 2007, the underlying *matters of concern* have become so embedded in culture, media and politics that they *do not go away*. The people cannot galvanise or protest against the Government in the same way as the Pedder or Franklin, because the Government is no longer *just* the Government. In order to protest something such as the Pulp Mill, the people must galvanise against: The Government, the opposition party, big business, the investors of big business, the shareholders, the workers, community groups and even politically minded religious sects. And all of this occurs *within* the mass media, in the form of letters, editorials, features, articles, video footage etc. All of these groups are engaged in an ongoing tactical (spin) campaign in a battle of ideologies. What is most interesting here is that this 'action' is not only *occurring* in the mass media, but that it is also *competing* for attention with the latest sports results and the daily lives of celebrity figures such as Paris Hilton! Even the most important issues that face society (even humanity!) become reduced to a three column slot or a 30 second TV grab that disappears from view the day after it surfaces... replaced by the 'brand new thing'. This is the process Parr deconstructs in his work *Age* (fig.34).

## John Voss

Put very simply, my artwork appropriates press photography. John Voss, a Tasmanian artist who had a working life as a press photographer before his artistic career, produces work that parodies and deconstructs the conventions of press photography. His works and writings have provided me with a number of crucial insights into the methodologies and 'behind the scenes' operations of this field. In his PhD exegesis, Voss argues that:

*"the public is both dependant on, and distrustful of the news' itself, but are relatively uncaring about how and where that information comes to them, the source, the intention of the source, the amount of doctoring or 'press-kiting' going on nor even the "rigidly controlled 'photo opportunities'".*<sup>79</sup>

He cites Carol Squires as contending that:

*"Information overload fatigue and escapist fantasies have made media imagery consumers disinterested in the contraction of diversity regarding 'hard' news images."*<sup>80</sup>

It is as a result of this 'contraction of diversity' that visual artists play an increasingly important role in the re-presentation of 'hard news' images. Voss illustrates this through his unconventional 'news' photographs, where he exposes some very unorthodox moments in the lives of political figures, such as in his portrait of Ray Groom (fig.35) who '*performed and made presentations to the camera of his own volition*'.<sup>81</sup> The posture of Groom as he reveals the splitting sole of his shoe is ungainly and carnival-esque. That a political figure of some importance would perform so candidly, ambiguously and in such an unflattering way is evidence of the importance of Voss's work, in that it highlights the contrivances of the choreographed 'media press kit' photograph (fig.36). This is also illustrated by comparing one of Voss's photos of ex-Prime Minister John Howard with his parliamentary 'press kit' photo of the same

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<sup>79</sup> Voss (2003) p.44

<sup>80</sup> Carol Squires, *Is Photojournalism Dead?*, American Photo, SEP / OCT, 1996

<sup>81</sup> Voss (2003) p.125



time (fig.37-38). In Voss's work we witness the man without the 'mask'; that is, without the duplicitous or contrived 'public image'.



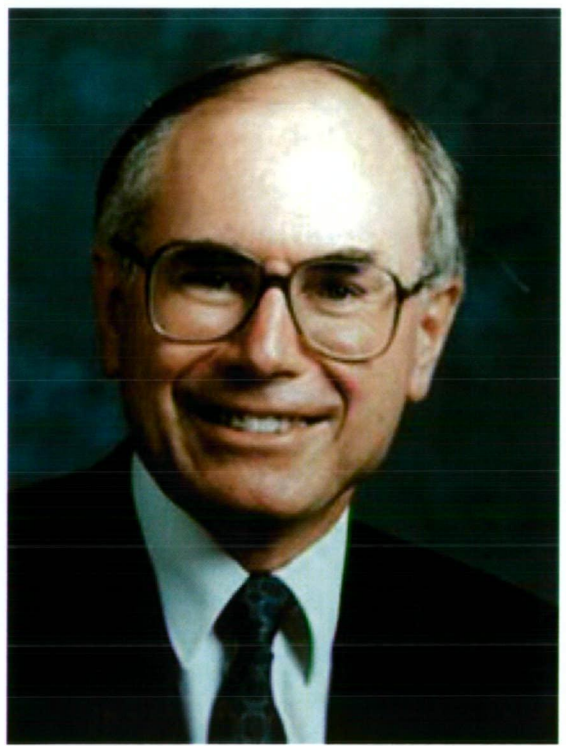
(fig.35) J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1996 (Tasmanian Premier, Ray Groom)



(fig.36) Ray Groom, Parliamentary photo, photographer unknown.

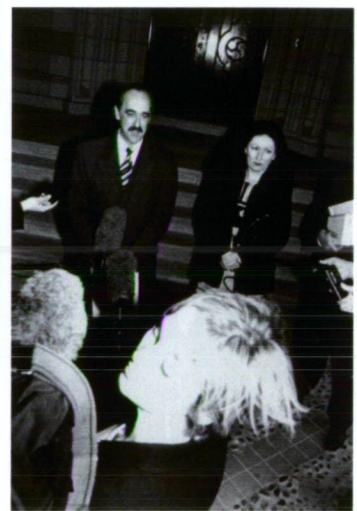
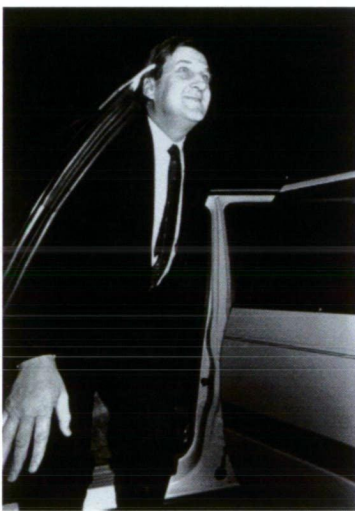


(fig.37) J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1996 (Prime Minister John Howard, Hobart)



(fig.38) John Howard, Parliamentary photo circa. 1996

Voss's angles are often at odds with conventional press photography, often askew or from a greater height or depth (fig.39). His photos capture political figures at moments of unpreparedness, or include elements of the official media circus as they interview their subject revealing moments and elements of media processes that usually remain hidden. Where the consumer sees an image of the politician from front on, answering a question, confident and direct, Voss reveals the in-between: the politician from an angle, microphones extended, the arm or head of a media crew, the off camera aides and minders of the politician and their expressions, which are often at odds with the expression of the politician 'on camera' (fig.40-41).



(fig.39) J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1994 (Premier Jeff Kennett alights, Wodonga Civic Centre, Victoria)  
(fig.40) J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1996 (L-R, Greg Turnbull and PM Keating, press conference, Hobart)  
(fig.41) J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1998 (Media operatives, [centre middle ground] Premier Jim Bacon and Honey Bacon)



## Megan Keating

Megan Keating, another Tasmanian based artist, is also concerned with visual representation of/within the *media environment*, specifically the 'screen', as outlined in her PhD exegesis, *The Space of the Screen & Contemporary Ambivalence*. Keating proposes that the screen has literal and metaphorical connotations that "*have resulted in an ambivalent condition of spatiality*" and which in turn "*suggests that this ambivalent condition of spatiality is indicative of contemporary experience.*"<sup>82</sup> In this context, Keating is discussing the screen beyond its most contemporary form, i.e. the digital screen, to include all historical uses of the screen as a device that projects, conceals, interfaces, filters, shuts out, deceives, reveals, mutes, protects etc.; a device that exists in a polarised interplay, of simultaneous comfort and unease, which, she says, is the source of contemporary anxieties. Essentially, Keating is discussing a device employed by the *mediated environment*; that is, the screen as a mediator, and that it has been an integral part of the *development* of media, comparable to the *word*, the *image*, and the *machine*. She describes how the screen has played an important role in the perception of spatiality, manifesting in contemporary image making as an "alternative perception of flatness", or possibly what Witkin describes as "*a self-contained and self-possessed field of signification.*"<sup>83</sup>

Employing such visual devices as toy soldiers, warplanes, helicopters, pornographic images and flowers, combined with patterning and decoration, Keating creates intricate and visually seductive works. Her methods include painting, paper cuts<sup>84</sup> and most recently, hand cut objects from rubber or astro-turf. Apart from the most recent works, which are black or the colour of the material employed, Keating has predominantly worked in pastel colours, usually blues and pinks, and in the bold reds of revolution (fig.42-44).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Megan Keating, *The Space of the Screen & Contemporary Ambivalence: PhD Exegesis*, Hobart: University of Tasmania, 2002, p.1

<sup>83</sup> Witkin (1995) p.109

<sup>84</sup> A stencil is essentially a paper cut – the difference being that a paper cut is not sprayed or printed. Figs. 42-46 are examples of Keating's paper cuts.

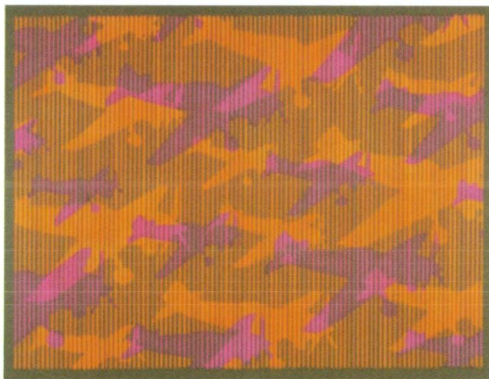
<sup>85</sup> Keating's use of red relates directly to the use of red in Chinese political posters.



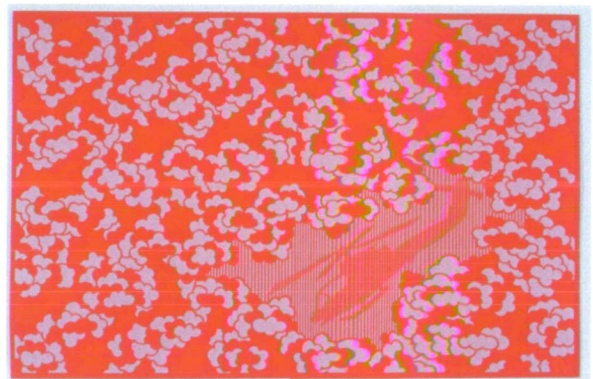
(fig.42) Megan Keating, *Invasion*, 2001

(fig.43) Megan Keating, *Raid*, 2001

(fig.44) Megan Keating, *Sniper*, 2001



(Fig.45) Megan Keating, *And Then There Were None - Flight Pattern #109*, 2003



(Fig.46) Megan Keating, *Smoke*, 2004

In her work, Keating employs paradox, irony and a deliberate engagement with masks, camouflage and decoys (fig.45-46), to propose what she terms “nothing”. This state of *nothing* being representative of what is behind the screen, of what is screened, indeed, of the ‘other’. It is the evocation of a state of trepidation and uncertainty. This state is highlighted in the works from Keating’s *Ground Control* series that, through her employment of pastel pinks and blues, remind me of a young girls bedroom, so innocent and innocuous they seem (fig.47-48). Upon closer inspection the soldiers and military equipment are revealed, and a state of unease ensues; but it is the unease of *not knowing*, of uncertainty, as distinct from the unease generated by the work of Bennett, which is the unease of *knowing*, of guilt and of horror. Here in

Keating's work, although there are many *referents* of war, there is no sense of the *horror* of war, such as may be found in Picasso's *Guernica* (fig.48) or in the works of Heartfield. These paintings are empty, devoid of emotion and passion. The *irony* contained in these works, however, aids in the deconstruction of the pretensions of the *screen*, enabling new *understandings* of its function. By revealing the underlying anxiety generated by the *screen*, Keating exposes the lack of substance that sits behind the veil of the *media environment*.



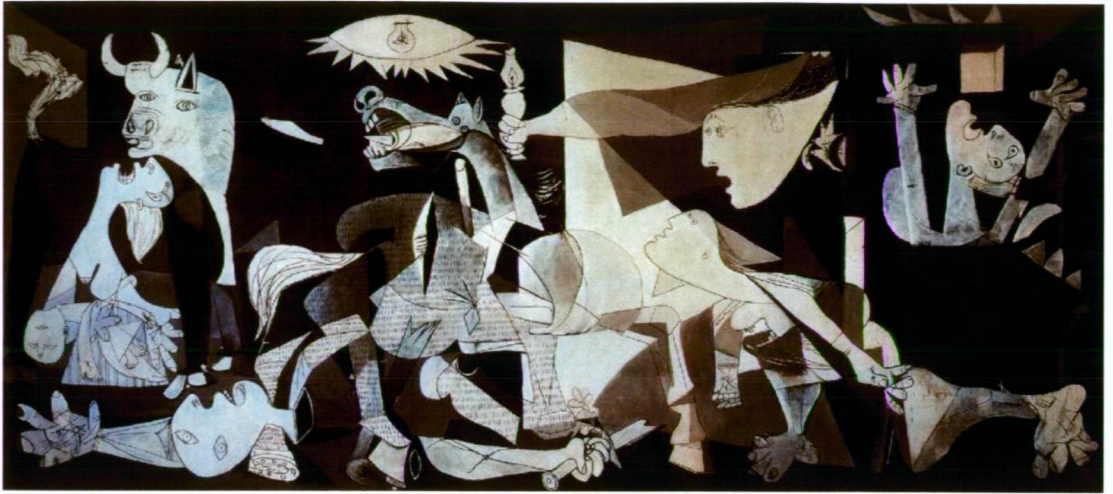
(fig.47) Megan Keating, *Clear and Pink Danger*, 2004



(fig.48) Megan Keating, *And Then There Were None - Friendly Fire*, 2003

As a painter engaged in similar areas of investigation to my own, Keating's artwork has often provided me with a visual and conceptual counterpoint. Where Keating's referents are *generic*, those that I use are *specific*; figures linked to *happenings* in the *material* world of actions and consequences.





(fig.49) Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937

## Conclusion

Through the discussion of these contexts, it becomes evident that; to develop a visual language engaged with dissent and critical opinion, we are doing so *through a mediated environment*. We cannot rely on matters of fact, as presented by this environment, as being truth or concrete, and so all we are left with are *matters of concern*, which we *also* engage with through this mediated environment. It follows then, that the medium *is* the message, and the *message* is a critique *of* the *medium*.

## Chapter Three – Development of the Project

### Introduction

This chapter of the exegesis details the development of the Project's three main bodies of work, as well as a selection of individual works that have impacted on the main bodies.

This includes an outline of the practical elements of the work - how the works were made, the materials and the processes.

I will discuss how the ideas behind each work or body of work explore the central argument of this project. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the work and the central ideas are inseparable from the context of *media*.

I will discuss the work in chronological order, beginning with works immediately prior to this project, in order to establish a starting point.



## Works completed prior to the Project

### BADGERS & HAWKS, 2005



(fig.50) *Badgers & Hawks* (detail), 2005

This painting formed part of an Honours project at the Tasmanian School of Art in 2005. This work is made up of repeated layers of two stencils; one is Iraqi Shiite Cleric and Anti-US Militia leader Moqtada Al Sadr, the other is Pentagon ‘hawk’ (US term) Paul Wolfowitz, then US Deputy Secretary of Defence. The two stencils are continuously disrupted on several layers by what I termed a *liquid stencil*; that is, using liquid latex to create splashes and drips that, when hardened, can be sprayed just like a stencil, leaving only the stencilled print behind when the latex is removed. Using colours associated with the military (khaki, green, sand), the resulting effect is that of *camouflage*. The theme running throughout this body of work was that of the

*mask* as a signifier of concealed intentions. This is a precursor to the theme of this research project, that of *duplicity* and *obfuscation*.

## DAWN OF THE GOLDEN AGE, 2005



(fig.51) *Dawn of the Golden Age*, 2005

*Dawn of the Golden Age* is a large, stencilled montage work that contains media sourced imagery juxtaposed to create dissonant associations. The work could be described as maximalist, and it certainly pays homage in its media cut-and-paste style to Dada, especially the artists John Heartfield and Raoul Hausmann. This work is the last in a series of montages, of this kind, that I have produced up to this time.

Consisting of layers of stencils combined with the *liquid stencils*, it depicts topical figures of that time, including then Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, Paul Wolfowitz, Moqtada al Sadr, Princess Mary of Denmark (Tasmanian), released hostage Douglas Wood, protestors, activists, children,



and a Saudi Arabian policeman. Centrally located in the picture are my own eyes encased in a balaclava (mask), which in turn is made up of crows (carrion eaters, hence death). In this work the subject is myself, embedded in a media environment.

## SEDITION, 2005



(fig.52) *Sedition*, 2005 (6 panels)

*Sedition 2005* was the final work produced in my Honours year at the Tasmanian School of Art. It is a summation of the ideas I had explored and the visual techniques I had developed. Here is the artist statement that accompanied the work:

*We created Saddam. We created Osama. We are the Empire. The News is not the News; it is a cacophony of financial and political interests that compete to persuade us, to create their own versions of the 'truth'. Religion is a bogus spirituality - both Islamists and Christians kill each other, and anyone else in their path, as they strive fanatically for domination. Everyone is a suspect. The rise of terror has seen the introduction of laws that are*

*more concerned with policing the masses and fortifying neo-liberalism than they are with addressing the root causes of such terror, and our implicit involvement. To kill a weed you pull out its roots - not hack at its leaves - lest it grow back more virulently and tenaciously than before. My art protests my Government's hacking of the leaves, it's failure to even acknowledge the existence of the root causes of terror, and it's attempts to silence it's critics by branding them sympathizers.*

*Terror is now officially part of the Empire.*

In this statement are the seeds of what has become the central matters of concern for this project, with a shift away from 'protesting against the government' to critiquing the media itself which lies at the heart of the dialogue. In fact, it could be argued that one of, if not *the* 'root cause of terror' is the control of media. And by this I mean the broad sense of media, extending to transport and hence fuel but also the media that shapes the thoughts and desires of the mass audience, hence shaping the ideology of that audience.

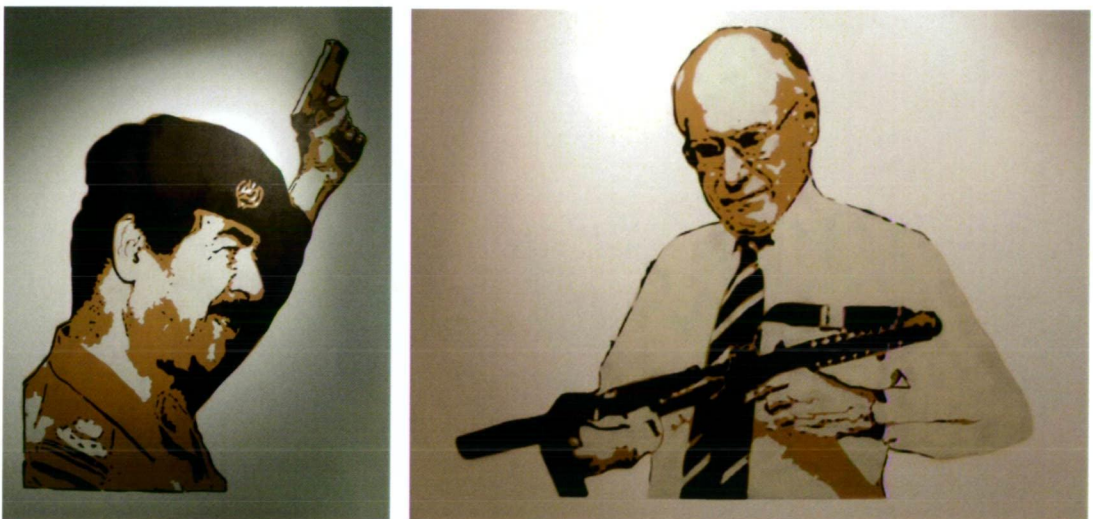
## The Development of the Project

### COMMON GROUND – BUS Gallery, Melbourne, April 2006



(fig.53) *Common Ground*, 2006, installation view, BUS Gallery (Melbourne)

The first major body of work in this research project came as a result of an opportunity through INFLIGHT Artist Run Initiative. There was an opportunity for 3 artists to exhibit at BUS Gallery in Melbourne, and I was selected as one of those artists and was given the main space to work with. The physical work was completed in three days in a friend's studio in Melbourne, as well as in the gallery.



(fig.54) *Saddam Hussein (ex. President of Iraq)*, *Common Ground*, 2006

(fig.55) *John Howard (Current Prime Minister of Australia, ex. Young Liberal)*, *Common Ground*, 2006



The AWB (Australian Wheat Board) kickbacks scandal was coming to light at the time these works were produced, so I was very interested in working with this material. The scandal was that the AWB was paying kickbacks, through trucking companies, to Saddam Hussein's regime, effectively by passing UN sanctions on Iraq. Being a government owned organisation, this activity was clearly at odds with Australia's involvement in the War on Iraq; that is, actively supporting the regime that you are condemning and later waging a war against.

One thing that was very noticeable in the images that were being presented by the media at that time was that several of the AWB Board Members had had their photographs taken in Iraq whilst posing with guns; namely, Trevor Flugge (then director of AWB) and Michael Long (then Board Member). I had previously collected several images in my 'media scrapbook' of other notaries posing with guns, including: Robin Gray (ex-Tasmanian Premier, current Gunns Ltd. Board Member); David Hicks (then alleged Australian terrorist); Saddam Hussein (deposed, now deceased, President of Iraq, fig.54); and John Howard (then Australian Prime Minister, fig.55). All of these figures, I am sure, had different reasons for being photographed with a gun; nonetheless, their representation here makes no distinction between those motivations. They are each treated equally, with the same rendering, line, colour and attention to detail; placed, as it were, on a *common ground*.

Technically, the work is an installation of wall paintings, employing the method of stencilling – essentially transposing the 'street' into the gallery. What is different from previous 'wall works' is that traces of process have been left in the space; that is, the cardboard stencils themselves. They are arranged in a configuration that mirrors the painted works, and in turn mirror each image from negative to positive (the sprayed stencil being an inversion of the cut stencil). This was intended as being indicative of *evidence*, and also as *counterpoint* in a media sense; by this I mean an alternative view, medium, way of seeing (hence way of picturing) and an *inversion* of what is *known*.

These wall paintings were my first deliberate effort to embed the *formal* elements of the work with *content* – what I have termed *form as content* in the

central argument. In this case, the content (or the *signified*) is corruption. The formal device (*signifier*) employed to indicate this is a degenerative line in the cutting, a line moving away from the typically clean and sharp stencil edge, into a worming, crawling line filled with dots, seemingly in a process of breaking down.



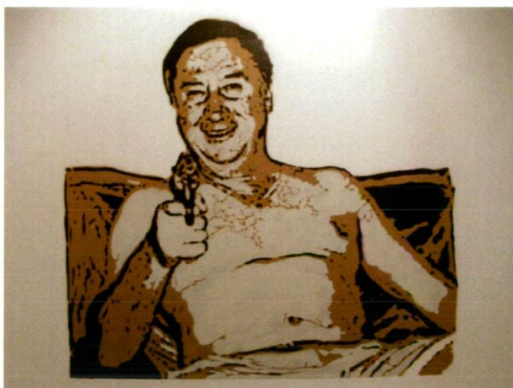
(Fig.56) David Hicks (*Our Man in Afghanistan*), *Common Ground*, 2006

This corruption was intended to indicate the inherent corruption of the political figure (the *referent*), as well as a corruption of information by way of the mass media and the biased and 'partial truths' it presents. There is also the corruption of the physical source material, which is primarily derived from low quality internet images and grainy newsprint images, which has been embellished so that there is a sense of the work being *about* media rather than attempting to *deny* it (as with a more polished or smoothly lined work). These are the artefacts of print and video media.

In this body of work I have explored a *spatial* method of orchestration; which stands in contrast to previous work, where images were juxtaposed and orchestrated *within* the picture frame. Here, the images are arranged within

the *gallery* space, so there is a noticeable absence of the ‘frame’ itself. In part, the reasoning behind this was to achieve a different state of engagement with the viewer, where instead of clearly being on the ‘outside’ of a painting ‘looking in’, the viewer is on the *inside* of the artworks, ‘looking out’, as it were, on these figures. These are techniques synonymous with those employed by installation artists, where the aim of the artwork is to create an *environment*.

This method of creating an *environment* marked the first investigation into the idea of the ‘political landscape’ through the employment of groups of *political figures*. With the exception of David Hicks (fig.56), we can place all of these figures into the category of ‘landholders’, whether it is by virtue of their political position or their business position in relation to companies that derive their main livelihood from property ownership or control (the forestry of Gunns Ltd. and the agricultural resource management of the AWB). In this sense, Hicks is the only non-landholder, therefore the only representation of the ‘subject’ or subservient, and predictably the one who suffered the worst fate: that of being held in indefinite solitary detention for 4 years. In the context of this grouping of figures, Hicks is offered as ‘the way out’. This work highlights the forgiveness of our own (western cultures) transgressions (AWB) and the over zealous punishment of the ‘other’ (Hicks as a Muslim, Saddam).



(fig.57) Trevor Flugge (*Our Man In Iraq*), Common Ground, 2006



(fig.58) Robin Gray (*Ex. Tasmanian Premier, Current Director Gunns Ltd.*), Common Ground, 2006

So what is the ‘political landscape’ that is depicted here? There is an element of what could be described, in an historical art context, of the picturing of the ‘noble hunt’; that is, the posing of noble, heroic and authoritarian landholders

as they maim, torture and kill wild (or tame) animals. Indeed, to willingly pose with a weapon of destruction is to acknowledge an intention or a partialness to inflict harm and death with that weapon. In this case, it is the viewer who becomes the animal (or the victim) in this work, locked into the sights of Trevor Flugge (fig.57) and Robin Gray (fig.58). As Eisenman put it in his outlining of a *pathos formula*<sup>86</sup> in Western art; the viewer is placed in a situation of "...complete subordination of the body to doctrine, and the willing surrender of the autonomous, critical subject to the dictates of state authority and power."<sup>87</sup> So if we are to take this context and idea one step further, the viewer/victim is placed in the position of subordination and willing surrender of autonomy to *media itself*.

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<sup>86</sup> *Pathos Formula*, as proposed by Eisenman (2007), is essentially a stereotypical type of image that has recurred throughout the history of Western pictorial tradition. They are images of torture, subordination, shame and degradation. Eisenman claims that these "*bodily expressions of power and subordination are so well internalised that no pictorial articulations, such as the Abu Ghraib photographs, can be produced at will, without dependance on particular visual prototypes. But that it is precisely the long Western history of the representation of torture that has helped inscribe an oppressive ideology of master and slave on our bodies and brains, enabling (especially at times of fear) a moral forgetfulness or even paralysis to set in – an 'Abu Ghraib Effect'.*" (Eisenman (2007) p.101). These images are often presented or viewed as being in good fun, a joke, or that the victims somehow deserved their treatment through virtue of their 'otherness', or even that they have *enjoyed* their abuse.

<sup>87</sup> Eisenman (2007) pp.90-91

## Individual Works

Between this body of work and the next body of work, *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*, a number of individual works were produced that significantly shaped the form and content of the remainder of the project. These works are discussed in chronological order.



## WHERE THE KICKBACKS ARE



(fig.59) *Where the Kick Backs Are* (after Maurice Sendak), 2006

This work is a continuation of the thematic of the AWB scandal that *Common Ground* touched upon. The work depicts John Howard (then Australian PM), Mark Vaile (then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade) and Alexander Downer (then Foreign Affairs Minister). It is an appropriation of Maurice Sendak's illustrations from his children's book *Where the Wild Things Are*. The work is a response to these Government Ministers' convenient memory loss regarding all matters pertaining to the AWB scandal, and the implied (and evidential) involvement of the government. The public too, are implicated in this scandal, in our relative silence in the face of very suspicious actions by AWB staff and public servants, such as the shredding of documents and the deleting of emails and hard-drives. It seems to be another case of forgiving our own transgressions; after all, any admission of guilt or wrongdoing would question the very fundamentals of why we are the 'good guys' and why Saddam is the 'bad guy'.

Sendak's accessible, realist illustrations provided an opening point to develop a method of 'populist' political comment. At that time I was considering different ways of approaching image making, with an interest to develop work that was non-specialist; that is, work that could appeal to a 'non-art audience'.

The idea that I had was to re-present popular imagery from childhood (or some similarly innocuous) experience in order to gain access to the viewers attention, with the aim of eliciting an immediate response of *recognition*. After the viewer has been drawn into viewing the work, the idea was that they begin to read the figures' *referents*; at which point they are engaged with the 'political reading' of the work. This idea is expanded upon through the employment of images of Paris Hilton in the same manner in the final body of work, *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*.

This painting is the first produced on aluminium, although I had experimented with off-cuts and found printing plates in the past, and the logic behind choosing this as a material was, for the most part, of a practical nature. A hard surface is optimal for the process of stencilling; so as pressure can be applied to the stencil and surface in order to produce a fine edge, avoiding leakage (termed *overspray* and *underspray*). In addition to this a flat, smooth surface is optimal for producing physically flat images as opposed to those that occur on a canvas or textured material. Aluminium possesses these qualities and has an added advantage of being associated with industrial processes, of which spray painting can also be associated, so it is complementary. The figures were produced with spray paint and stencils, and the background was produced with high gloss household enamel (another industrial medium). The use of industrial mediums in my work is linked in with my own working background as a Pre-Pressman at a printing firm, where I engaged in computer and hand design, photographic reproduction and the production of aluminium printing plates for offset printing. These skills have come into play more so, as my art making has developed over several years.



(fig.60) *Where the Kickbacks Are*, Goulborne Street, Hobart



## EVEN BAD GUYS LOOK GOOD WHEN THEY'RE DEAD



(fig.61) *Even Bad Guys Look Good When They're Dead*, 2006

*"With a \$25 million American bounty on his head, the Jordanian-born Mr. Zarqawi has been the most-wanted man in Iraq for his leadership of Islamic terrorist groups that have carried out many of the most brutal attacks of the war, including scores of suicide bombings, kidnappings and beheadings. In his late 30's, he had been named "Prince of Al Qaeda" in Iraq by Osama Bin Laden, Al Qaeda's fugitive leader."*<sup>88</sup>

This is an appropriation of the enlarged photograph of deceased terrorist leader Abu Al Zarqawi that was presented to a media press conference by the US military upon his killing. The photograph was displayed in a golden frame, not dissimilar to something that may have been looted from the Bagdad Museum in the first stages of the invasion in 2003. In addition to this, the framed image was displayed like a trophy (as it was), which to me recalled

<sup>88</sup> New York Times, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Sourced from: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/middleeast/08cnd-iraq.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/middleeast/08cnd-iraq.html?_r=1&oref=slogin) – (visited: 08.12.07)

such mythical tales as David and Goliath, Perseus and Medusa, and Theseus and the Minotaur; evoking Stephen F. Eisenman's theory of a *pathos formulae* – those historically familiar, archetypal images that prescribe (subconsciously) our interpretations.



(fig.62) US Military press conference, photographer unknown, 2006

In the military press images (orchestrated as set out by Voss, fig.62) Zarqawi's head is large, like a giant's, the two military officials seeming small, merely human, as they point to their defeated foe. One could imagine Zarqawi as a titanic, *Rasputian* figure, pillaging whole towns and destroying everything in his path, and the US military as *Lilliputian* figures scrambling from his might, doing everything in their power just to halt his progress. The reality was, I am sure, quite the opposite. Zarqawi, responsible for many deaths directly and indirectly, would have been a hunted figure, running from one safe house to the next, more like a fox than a giant, with the weight of the world's most powerful army concentrated on rooting him out and destroying him (the *Noble Hunt*). By saying this, I do not condone any of the actions of Zarqawi; what interests me is the emblematic nature of the situation, and the loaded imagery that was employed by the US to signify it. Stephen Eisenman, in his discussion of the 'Abu Ghraib' photos, discusses how this depiction of an enemy as bestial is used to justify the actions of the oppressor.

*"The presence of the one (perverse desires of Islamic detainees) provides ideological justification for the other (unrepressed desires of the US), the supposed*



*bestiality of the victim justifies the crushing violence of the oppressor: "The military and the new Right, like the conquerors of old, discover the evil they have imputed to these aliens, and mimic the savagery they have imputed."*<sup>89</sup>

In this work I have pushed the idea of *form as content*, further fragmenting and breaking down the formal elements of the work into a parched-desert-floor surface, riddled with wormholes and dots. A spidering of lines also occurs between the repeated faces, referencing networks and connections. It has been often remarked that terrorist organizations are like *Hydras*, many headed dragons that grow more heads for each one that is cut off. This is indicated in the work through the repetition of the face, which could also be seen to indicate the many faces of Zarqawi himself, a notorious master of disguise. The gold coloured paint employed references the gold frame used in the media conference.

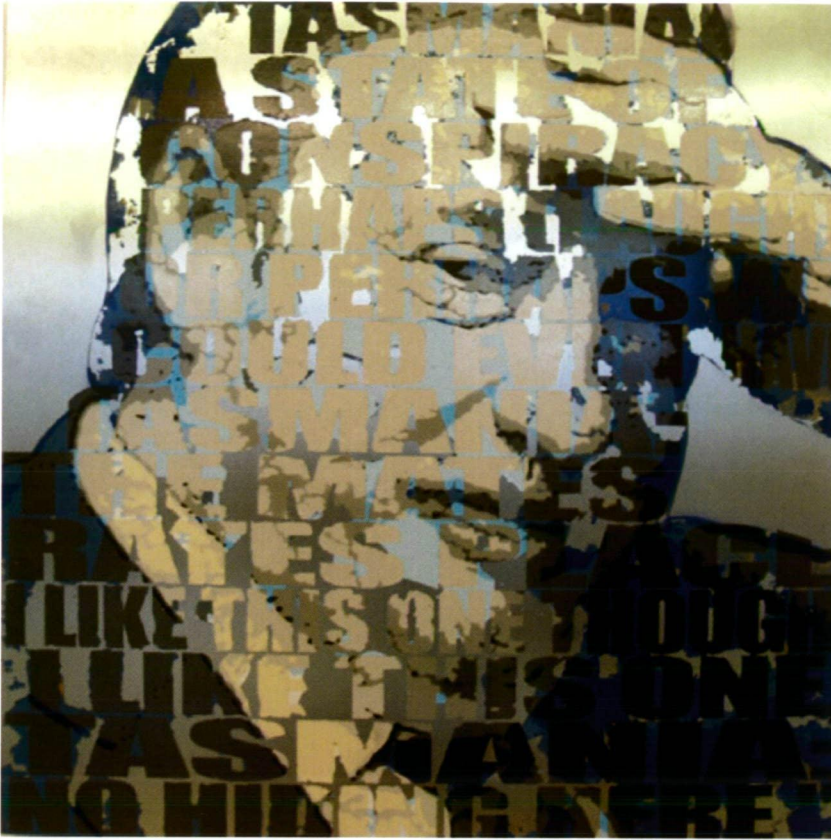
The resulting work is ironic. This man who "*carried out many of the most brutal attacks of the war, including scores of suicide bombings, kidnappings and beheadings*"<sup>90</sup> seems almost peaceful here in death. In fact, a number of people mistakenly identified the figure in this work as that of the Buddha. The titling of the work suggests this literal translation of irony, as well as hinting at the broader idea of "*mimic<ing> the savagery they have imputed*" – in essence making a *bad* man look *good* through virtue of their treatment of that man. What this work also begins to deal with is the countering of that idea of the *pathos formulae* in western art, as described above and in Chapter 2. So the ironic mode of this work seeks to *deconstruct* and *expose* the *pathos formula* that occurs in the original

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<sup>89</sup> Eisenman (2007) p. 101 – containing a quote by Michael Taussig, *Culture of Terror – Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture*, Comparative Studies in Society and History, XXVI/3, 1984, p. 470

<sup>90</sup> New York Times, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Sourced from: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/middleeast/08cnd-iraq.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/middleeast/08cnd-iraq.html?_r=1&oref=slogin) – (visited: 08.12.07)

**“The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties...”**



(fig.63) “The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties”, 2006

This painting depicts Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon, constructed with the use of text sourced from Hansard (Parliamentary transcriptions) in which Paul Lennon is quoted. The title refers to the article on the ABC Online website from which the quote was sourced. The part of the quote appearing in the painting is in bold type.

*‘He (Paul Lennon) used Question Time to announce there has been an overwhelming response to a campaign to find a new slogan for the state. Mr Lennon said he had a few suggestions of his own.*

***“Tasmania: a state of conspiracy perhaps (laugh) or perhaps we could even have Tasmania: the mates rates place. I like this one though, I like this one, Tasmania: no hiding here.”***

*The suggestions were well received by the Opposition parties.<sup>91</sup>*

<sup>91</sup> ABC News Online, Thursday, 22 June 2006. Sourced from:  
<http://www.abc.net.au/elections/tas/2006/news/stories/1669516.htm?elections/tas/2006/> – (visited: 16.01.08)

Inbuilt into this quote are *matters of concern* as outlined in the central argument. These are: duplicity (“*state of conspiracy perhaps (laugh)*” and “*mates rates place*”); and obfuscation (“*Tasmania: no hiding here*”). It is possible to interpret this quote as being a Freudian slip by Mr. Lennon, or an accidentally and ironically honest turn of phrase, however I think it is the “(laugh)” that suggests something more sinister, a certain untouchability or impunity, perhaps.

The image appropriated in this work was sourced from news print media at a time proceeding the quote used (fig.64), that depicts Lennon shifting uncomfortably in his seat, face half hidden by his hand (“no hiding here”), as parliament is informed that his then Deputy Premier, Brian Green, was to be charged with conspiracy (“state of conspiracy”) and stand trial over alleged criminal conduct in relation to a monopoly clause signed with an ex-Labor minister, John White (“mates rates place”). And so it was, that there was a certain prophetic and synchronistic nature to the Premier’s words in Parliament just a few months earlier. I had all the material I needed for a portrait of the Tasmanian Premier.



(fig.64) News media photograph of Paul Lennon



(fig.65) Sedition, 2005, detail

Working with the now established idea of corrupting the image, or *form as content*, I was interested in bringing back elements from previous work, such



as camouflage, especially as an indicator of *obfuscation*. There was also the opportunity to work with text as I had done in some previous work, especially *Sedition 2005*, Pt. 4 (fig.65).



(fig.66) "*The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties*", 2006, detail.

As the image surface became more important to the idea of *form as content*, such as in the Zarqawi piece, it occurred to me that it was possible to introduce elements of *physical* corruption into the work in addition to the pictorial corruption that was already happening. In *The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties* the *physical* space of the painting has been corrupted by means of tearing off the painted surface from the aluminium (fig.66). The reflective aluminium surface is exposed through these tears and rips, the physical surface of the work reduced to fragments of paint and 'mirror', edges curling back and flaking where the paint begins to separate from surface. In this painting corruption has become explicit. Even without the text or gesture of the figure, it implies the corruption of this figure. A dislocation occurs in this work, where fragments of colour, shape and reflection become abstracted amongst the image and its inherent pictorial



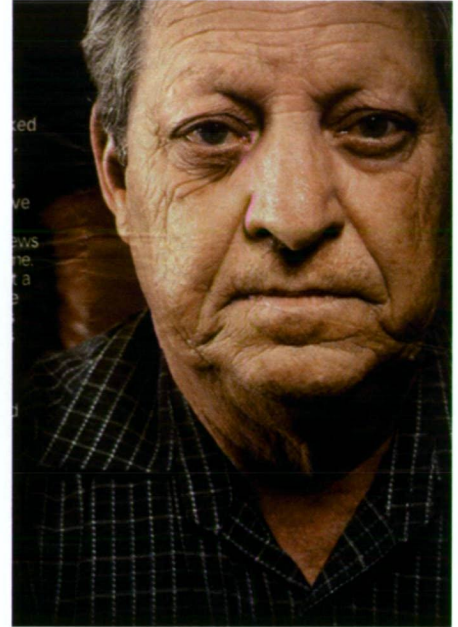
corruption, the physical tears, and the breaking down of the text; it has become *camouflage*.

This painting is central to the thesis for it's resolution of the idea of *form as content*. Although I continued experimenting with the idea, it will be this work that I return to in the future as a starting point for further investigation into this formal technique.

## TERRY HICKS



(fig.67) Terry Hicks, 2006, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 55 x 55cm



(fig.68) Original media image of Terry Hicks.

In this work I returned to the pictorial techniques that I had developed with *Even Bad Guys Look Good When They're Dead*. I had a desire to push the *pictorial* corruption of the work further; to see where it could go in a purely aesthetic sense, as distinct from the *physical* corruption that occurred in *The suggestions were well received...* After a number of experiments and digital trials, it became apparent that the source image plays an important role in how far an image will allow itself to break apart. By this I mean that small Internet jpgs (common image file type) have a limited amount of information that they contain, a certain blur or a limited number of pixels. In order to develop this technique, I realised the need to source a higher quality image, rich in information, which could be pushed wherever I wanted it to go. I found this image in the form of a photograph of Terry Hicks that appeared in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* (fig.68). The choice of this image was also a direct response, on my part, to the power of the photo; even more so to the emotive power contained in the lines, stare and expression of this man who had experienced what to my mind would have been one of the most harrowing human experiences. Hicks helplessly witnessed his child, David Hicks,

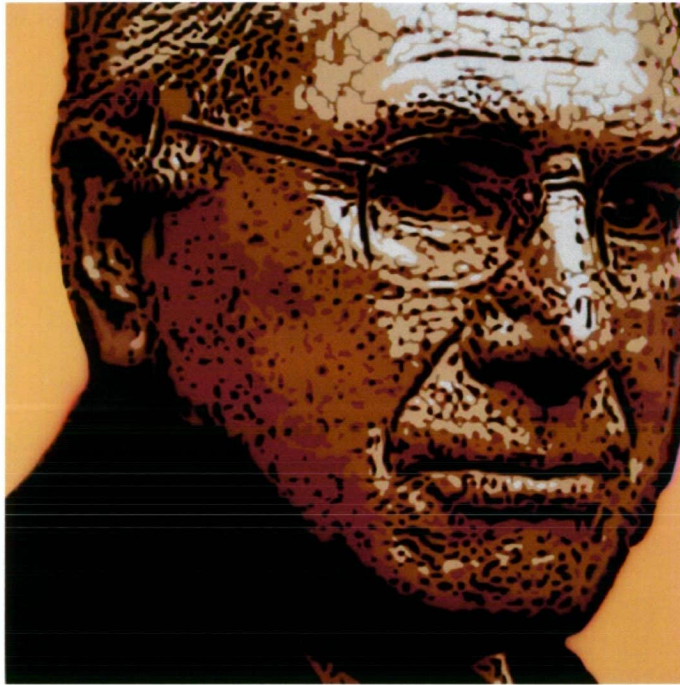
incarcerated in solitary confinement indefinitely, with no guarantee of ever being released; essentially, kidnapped.

The finished work lent itself to reproducibility, possibly by virtue of it being more sentimental to the establishment rather than the anti-establishment – the common man's plight rather than the throes of dictators and leaders in their political wrangling. Whatever the case, I produced editions of this work on paper and aluminium, individually and in series with other works, which were in turn reproduced in a number of different media platforms across newspapers, street press, websites, legal journals and promotional material (see Appendix B). This could be attributed in no small part to the image being selected as the feature image of the 2007 Melbourne Stencil Festival, which also toured across various parts of Australia. This process, of feeding back into the mass media, images of an artwork that contains imagery sourced *from* that media, led me to first consider what I have termed the *media loop*, as outlined in Chapter 1. Aside from the obvious questions of authorship and originality, this process revealed an *irony* in and of itself; that is, it served to deconstruct and expose the processes by which an image can gain a *viral* nature. This idea is explored in a more deliberate fashion in the next body of work, *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*.

The cutting of the 6 layers of this stencil took nearly a week of full time work. Through this process, I developed a 'bond' with the image of this man, and in turn with the man himself, at least in an abstract sense. I felt a deep sense of compassion, pity and somehow empathy. I felt sad for him. The lines, cracks and dots that have been embellished in this work in turn came to signify something other than *corruption* through this process. They became signifiers of mazes, bureaucracy, hardship and weathering; and rather than breaking apart and collapsing, the image seems to be *coalescing*. There was a sense here, in my mind, of the *Kafkaesque* – a term I would readily associate with the experiences of both Terry and David Hicks. This interchangeable or ambivalent nature of a formal device that is employed to indicate content, as I had been attempting with the idea of *form as content*, somewhat questioned my conceptual underpinnings. It occurred to me that despite *my* ascribing of a value on a formal device, the end reading becomes fairly arbitrary, and hinges

more on the *referents* employed in the work and the *relationship* of those *referents* to the viewer. This was something that the Dadaists had understood from the beginning. This discovery spurred me to develop other methods of approaching my *matters of concern* beyond the stencil, eventually leading to the formal leap that occurred in the next body of work, "*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*".

## JOHN HOWARD



(fig.69) John Howard, 2007

This work (fig.69) was produced as a follow up to the *Terry Hicks* painting, and intended as a 'matching pair'. Essentially exploring the further aesthetic development of the idea of *form as content*, this painting of John Howard is riddled with dots and cracks, diseased and disintegrating. The same colour scheme as the *Terry Hicks* work is employed here, as well as a similar cropping device. What is different between the two works is that *Terry Hicks* faces the viewer, his stare direct and open. On the other hand, *John Howard* is turning his back towards the viewer; looking at the viewer through a sideways, somewhat moping, glance. It was intended that when placed together, *Hicks* appears open and honest, and *Howard* deceptive and concealing.



## TASMANIA: EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES



(fig.70) “Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities”, 2007, Installation view, INFLIGHT Gallery, Hobart

The next major body of work in this project is “Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities” (fig.70) shown at INFLIGHT Gallery in Hobart, March 2007. This series is a conceptual progression from painting *The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties*, although this work takes a drastically altered formal approach. The original title of the show was “Tasmania: Pre-empted”, a play on an old Tasmanian slogan “Tasmania: Be Tempted”. In a somewhat serendipitous turn of events, the new Tasmanian slogan (which was the winner of the competition for which Paul Lennon made his own suggestions, as above) was “Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities”. And so it was a near given to title my exhibition exactly that, encouraging the viewer to explore the links and idiosyncrasies of Tasmanian Politics and business, as will be briefly outlined.

The result of this project was eleven paintings of Tasmanian political figures. They ranged across Government members, past and present, businessmen and members of religious sects, representing my *matters of concern* in regards to Tasmanian Politics and the *media environment*. What these figures, or at least their *referents*, had/have in common was/is an interest in shaping the political and economic future of Tasmania through control of land and resources, and who in turn were/are actively engaged with media to present or *obfuscate* their intentions and motivations to the public, often in *duplicitous* ways. Here I will cite the case of Edmund Rouse (fig.71), once Chairman of Gunns (now Gunns Ltd., Tasmania’s major private forestry business) and head of Tasmania’s media empire, ENT<sup>92</sup>. Rouse was convicted in 1989 of attempting to bribe a Member of Parliament (Jim Cox, Labour) in order to

<sup>92</sup> “FOR many years ENT Ltd was the dominant player in Tasmanian media, with considerable interests in newspapers, television and radio. It has also owned or held interests in a number of non-media assets, and during the 1980s was regarded as Tasmania’s largest non-resource group, with a market capitalisation of around \$120 million (Business Review Weekly 1989, p.160).” Stephen Tanner, *The Rise and Fall of Edmund Rouse*, 1995

return a Liberal Government (then headed by another figure portrayed in this exhibition, Robin Gray, fig.72), thus avoiding a Labor/Green Coalition. Others implicated, though not convicted, in the case were Robin Gray (who received \$10,000 from Rouse, which he kept in either a football sock or freezer bag at his home), David McQuestin (then Managing Director of ENT, now Director of Gunns Ltd.) and John Gay (then Chief Executive of Gunns, now its Executive Chairman, fig.73)<sup>93</sup>. It was a chapter of Tasmanian history that would be echoed in more contemporary times. In 2006 an ex-Labor Minister, John White (fig.75), was charged with criminal offences along with then Deputy Premier Brian Green for their part in securing a monopoly clause in a deal between the Government and John White’s business, the TCC (Tasmanian Compliance Commission). John White pleaded guilty to the charge of conspiracy, but was not convicted by the Judge, and Brian Green is to face a retrial in March 2008, as the Jury was not able to reach a unanimous decision in the first trial. There are various other links, deals and scandals that are explored in this body of work through the use of ‘info cards’ detailing the various figures activities, connections and quotes. As a response from the public audience, a comment I heard on numerous occasions was that the work reminded them of a “*rogues gallery*”.



(fig.71) Edmund Rouse, 2007



(fig.72) Robin Gray, 2007



(fig.73) John Gay, 2007

<sup>93</sup> “Most seriously affected was Gray. He admitted being told twice by Rouse of a potential Labor defector, but flatly rejected any suggestion bribery was ever discussed. Gray’s task of proving his innocence was complicated by a pre-election political donation from Rouse of \$10,000 cash, which Gray kept for months in a bedroom cupboard. Also affected were John Gay, chief executive of Gunns, who underwent a torrid scrutiny of his business in the royal commission, and ENT’s managing director, David McQuestin. Charged with several offences, McQuestin beat all proceedings against him. When Rouse undertook the bribery attempt, he was chairman of Gunns. Its failure ended any direction of the company by him. Not so the others who were entangled. Gay stayed as chief executive, and last week he officially became its executive chairman. Both Gray and McQuestin are well-established Gunns directors.” Andrew Darby, *The hubris that brought an island dynasty undone*, The Age, August 4 2002.



The main methodology for the production of this series was the employment of *freehand* aerosol techniques; *freehand* being a term used by street artists to describe a way of drawing with cans without the use of stencils. Another street term that this type of work relates to is that of the *throwup*, which is a quickly executed ‘tag’ or ‘symbol’ that employs the use of only two colours and has a ‘sketchy’ feel. In essence, these figures are ‘throwups’ over the Tasmanian environment. There were several reasons for this change of formal direction, i.e. from that of the *stencil*, in addition to the reason outlined in discussion of the work *Terry Hicks*. Firstly, I had been very interested in developing a new technique as part of this project, one that would compliment and ‘add’ to those techniques I had already developed (stencilling, latex, montage etc.). It is an interest in developing a range of formal options for dealing with my *matters of concern* and the various *referents* that populate those concerns. Initially, as I had set out in the proposal of this project, I had imagined this technique would take the form of screen printing, and it was through the course of this investigation that I came to understand that stencilling is, in a formal and process based sense, almost the same as screen printing. The development of a *freehand* technique then, enabled me to develop another, quite separate, *aesthetic*. Secondly, I was aware that due to the intricate and labour intensive nature of this stencilling process, I was losing *immediacy*. In earlier works, the immediacy of the stencil was very important. It enabled me respond and execute works in a short time frame, operating in a near simultaneous fashion with the instant *media environment*. This process of immediacy aided in the deconstruction of that media environment. So this work concerned itself with immediacy and the *unencumbered gesture*<sup>94</sup>, being able to respond and engage quickly, and without ‘loading’ the works too heavily, as was beginning to occur in the stencilled work. Thirdly, with the conceptual underpinnings of this body of work already in motion, I knew from the beginning that I did not want to make these figures look *heroic*. The stencil, through cultural associations (Che Guevera images, Chinese & Russian propaganda posters etc.) has a *heroic* nature. As proposed by Witkin via Hauser, this may be attributed to the notion that abstracted or geometrised forms represent an ideal world that transcends the experience of individuals, a world that is of the ‘emblematic’ and the symbolic; “a self-

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<sup>94</sup> This term was coined by my supervisor, Paul Zika, in a discussion of the work.

contained and self-possessed field of signification.”<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the more ‘naturalistic’ or perceptual-realist art forms seek to “capture the sensuous import of the individual’s material encounters in the world... to convey their (objects) larger significance in the materially grounded and lived experience of the individual subject.”<sup>96</sup> In both cases, of the stencil and of the freehand gesture, we could argue that they are hybrids of abstraction and realism, and so fall somewhere in between those modes just described, albeit one to either side. In these works, there is more of the *subjective* and *sensuous*, an encounter with *materially grounded* experience, exemplified by the presence of gesture and its distortion of form. A part of this sensuous, even emotional, engagement could be ascribed to the *local* nature of the *matters of concern*. This body of work marked the beginning of the development of what could be described as a realist shorthand, an easily accessible form of populist illustration, such as that developed by the *Capitalist Realists* and the Pop artists.<sup>97</sup> There are also several connections to Gerhard Richter’s paintings from 1988, of the Baader-Meinhof group of terrorists (fig.74), in their use of monochromatic scale (derived from news print sourced imagery) and the insistence of the works that the subjects/situation be remembered.<sup>98</sup> Richter was one of the founders of the *Capitalist Realist* group.



(fig.74) Gerhard Richter, *October 18, 1977*, 1988

After attempting four paintings in this manner, I began to find a flow with this technique. I turned those four paintings over and used the reverse side of the

<sup>95</sup> Witkin (1995) p. 109

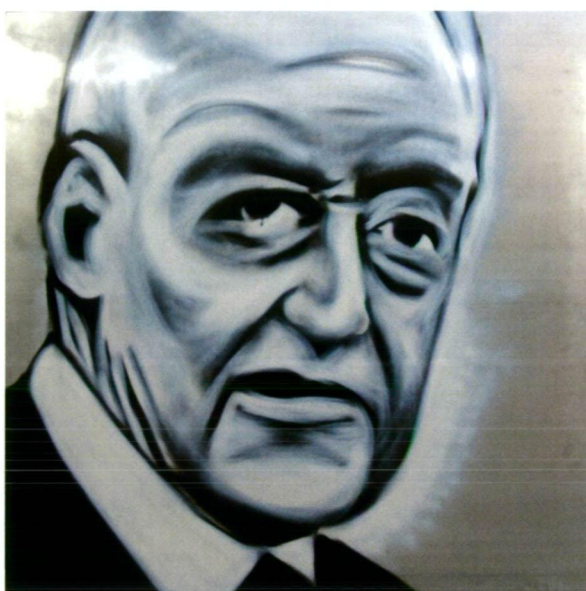
<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.121

<sup>97</sup> This method of ‘realist shorthand’ is further developed in the next body of work, *First We Take Paris, The We Take the World*, and discussed in the text relating to that work.

<sup>98</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999, p. 309



aluminium to repaint them (fig.75). Each painting, aside from image research and development, was executed in around 30 minutes to 2 hours. It was a vigorous, physically intensive painting style, with broad gestures and motions (often to the accompaniment of Punk music), working from the shoulder. I had engaged in a limited amount of freehand character work on the street prior to this project (fig.76), so I had some understanding of this painting process and had already developed a basic skill base for working with spray cans in this manner (which is essential to the medium, dubbed affectionately in the community as ‘can control’).



(fig.75) John White, 2007, from *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*



(fig.76) freehand character on street, 2006

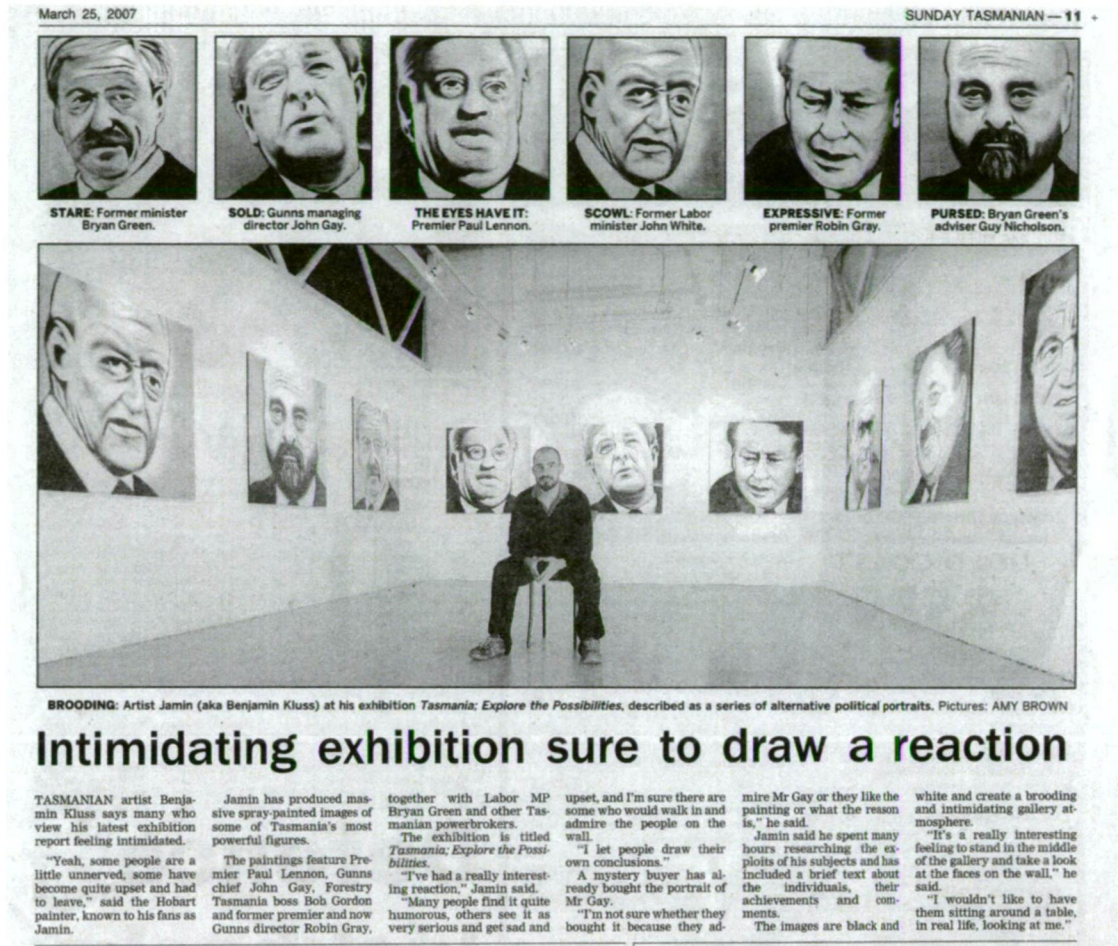
Another formal element that was included in these works was the exposed aluminium surface around the figures, this was intended to signify the *complicity* of the viewer. In these works, there is a clearly defined sense of *paint* and *surface*, albeit an ambiguous sense of *ground*. Upon closer inspection of the paintings, the *paint* becomes more viscous, with cracks and splatters, and becomes increasingly apparent to be a thin layer sitting on the top of a surface that is resistant to its presence. The paint cannot penetrate the aluminium, as with cloth or canvas or wood, so it remains separate: a *mask*, an *obfuscation*. On inspection of that *surface* (the aluminium), the viewer is confronted by the reflection of him/her self. So the viewer *becomes* the ground upon which the construct is created, in the same way that the mass

audience is the ground upon which the construct of media is created. So the viewer becomes *complicit* in the political machinations that are represented through the work, with the *media* as the *interface* that allows this complicity to occur. Through this process the physical objects of the paintings themselves become *signifiers* of the *media environment*.

The figures appear bloated and in movement, a corpulent dance, yet they are static and framed (ala the journalistic photo). They are represented in moments of interrogation or stress, in supreme confidence or in defence. The images were sourced from a wide variety of media, including the newspaper archives of the State Library in Hobart, current newspapers, journals and the Internet. Some of these men are very camera shy, and so it was difficult to find an appropriate image, and in some cases, impossible (such as with David McQuestin). In their combined effect, these *political figures* (the referents) *signify* the dominant Tasmanian *political landscape*, as set out in Chapters 1 and 2.

This exhibition marked *the* significant turning point of the project, and most likely remains the most central work of this thesis. In addition to the formal shifts as outlined above, and in addition to the amount of research that went into this body of work, there occurred for me a fundamental shift in the way I was perceiving the core context of this project; that it was not *politics* per se, but *media*. This new understanding governed my approach towards the final body of work, *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World. “Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities”* also signalled the first deliberate approach to what I have termed the *media loop*, which inadvertently occurred with the *Terry Hicks* work (as set out above). In this case I employed the methodologies of the political press conference (as exposed by John Voss and mentioned in Chapter 2) by creating media releases, Internet postings and by canvassing opportunities with non-mainstream news media such as [www.tasmaniantimes.com](http://www.tasmaniantimes.com) and [www.tasmedia.com](http://www.tasmedia.com), both of whom published articles on the work. From there, The Sunday Tasmanian newspaper picked up on the exhibition and published a half page article, complete with images of most of the works. It was the successful re-integration, back into the mass media, of images that had been sourced from that media, doctored by my hand. So it was media referencing

media referencing media, and if that irony was lost on the public, it was not lost on me (fig.77).



(fig.77) "Intimidating exhibition sure to draw a reaction" Simon Bevilaqua, Sunday Tasmanian, March 25, 2007, p.11



## FIRST WE TAKE PARIS, THEN WE TAKE THE WORLD



(fig.78) *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*, 2007, installation views, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport

The final body of work for this thesis is titled *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*, a bastardisation of a Leonard Cohen song title from 1988, *First We Take Manhattan (Then We Take Berlin)*. It has been suggested, in various critical reviews and interpretations, that these lyrics are connected, in some way, with a ‘terrorist’ viewpoint.

*“They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom  
For trying to change the system from within  
I’m coming now, I’m coming to reward them  
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin*

*I’m guided by a signal in the heavens  
I’m guided by this birthmark on my skin  
I’m guided by the beauty of our weapons  
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin...*

*...Ah you loved me as a loser, but now you’re worried that I just might win  
You know the way to stop me, but you don’t have the discipline  
How many nights I prayed for this, to let my work begin  
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin*

*I don’t like your fashion business mister  
And I don’t like these drugs that keep you thin  
I don’t like what happened to your sister  
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin...”<sup>99</sup>*

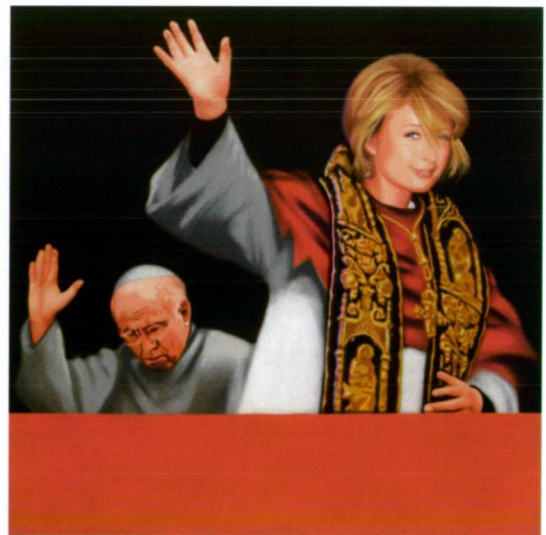
<sup>99</sup> Leonard Cohen, *First We Take Manhattan*, from the album *I’m Your Man*, Columbia Records, 1998



This body of work is the most experimentally important to the thesis, yet the most difficult to evaluate in terms of its success in achieving what it sets out to present. The techniques employed to produce these paintings are a *hybridisation* of the techniques that have been explored throughout the project. It contains elements of stencilled and freehand spray-can work, and elements of hand painted (brushed) work. The introduction of brushed oil painting into these works occurred for three reasons. The first was to bring in another technique that would allow me to further investigate the idea of *form as content*. The second was to investigate what happens when the medium changes (if one presupposes the idea of the *medium is the message*), and how that may affect the reading of the work, that is, by altering the *signifiers* how would that alter what is *signified*? One of the altered readings observed was that the work being a hybrid of ‘street’ and traditional ‘gallery’ work became more pronounced. The third and most significant reason for introducing the ‘hand painted’ was to expand on that idea of *populism* that had developed through the previous work, “*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*”.



(fig.79) *Closer*, 2007



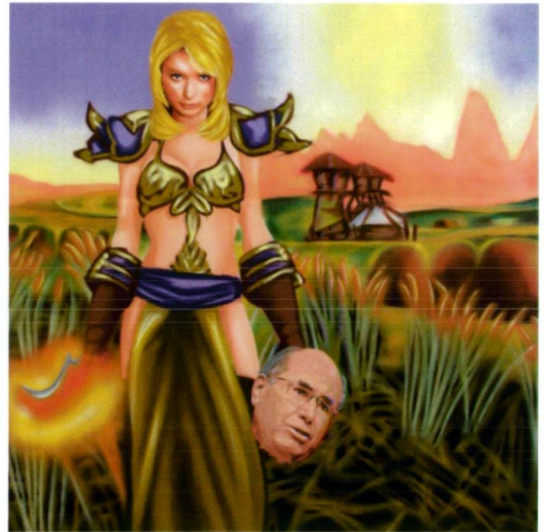
(fig.80) *Touched (By the Hand of God)*, 2007

I have treated the ‘hand painted’ as another ‘tool’ to facilitate the development of an easily accessible form of realist illustration (fig.79-80). The development of this technique has also furthered my aim to make the work accessible to a non-specialist audience, as the general public (the mass audience) are already well versed in the *perceptual-realist* codes of Western pictorial traditions (as outlined by Witkin, MacLuhan and Eisenman), and as

evidenced by the success of image based popular culture and media. It is not my aim to develop oil painting techniques such as those practiced by the master painters of the Renaissance; the aim is to produce something with a visual appeal similar to that of magazine advertising, Indian bill-board art, or of the local sign-writer – basically an *industrial* technique. The use of these industrial techniques is synonymous with the processes employed by many of the Pop artists from the 60's and 70's. Interestingly, many of these artists had careers in commercial illustration, design or billboard painting (as have I) before careers as artists, such as James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol. Also of significance to this technique are the *Capitalist Realists* (Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Konrad Lueg), as previously mentioned, who founded an art (anti)style that “appropriated the pictorial ‘short-hand’ of advertising”.<sup>100</sup>



(fig.81) *I Just Died In Your Arms Tonight*, 2007



(fig.82) *Internet Killed the Video Star*, 2007

Another ‘populist’ pursuit in the work is the attributing of painting titles to pop songs. There are several ways in which this device operates, the primary being to provide a humorous or ironic play between text and image. In *I Just Died In Your Arms Tonight* (fig.81) we witness Paris Hilton crying out in pain and anguish whilst cradling the body of fallen Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Upon reading the title, it is possible that we have the song by the same name, by 80's band Cutting Crew, playing out in our heads, with its impassioned (and cheesy) sentiment. Another way in which the naming device operates is to provide ‘cryptic’ clues into the work’s metaphorical content. *America, Fuck*

<sup>100</sup> Quote from the Tate Britain website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/polke/polke.htm>



*Yeah!* (fig.83) depicts Paris Hilton wearing a “Vote or Die” t-shirt, an appropriation from a US electoral campaign that she was involved with in 2004. The text that runs through the work is a quote by Iraqi soccer team captain, Youniss Mahmoud, after his team won the 2007 Asia Cup. In the quote he makes an impassioned plea for America to leave Iraq. So there is an irony between Paris’s “Vote or Die” t-shirt and the situation imposed on the Iraqi people by the ‘coalition of the willing’; that is, of forced democracy, a much heavier and rather grim version of ‘vote or die’. This irony is further revealed through the song lyric of *America, Fuck Yeah!*, by Trey Parker, from the movie *Team America*.



(fig.83) *America, Fuck Yeah!*, 2007

“...America, FUCK YEAH!  
Coming again, to save the mother fucking day yeah,  
America, FUCK YEAH!  
Freedom is the only way yeah,  
Terrorist your game is through cause now you have to answer to,  
America, FUCK YEAH!  
So lick my butt, and suck on my balls,

*America, FUCK YEAH!*

*What you going to do when we come for you now,*

*It's the dream that we all share; it's the hope for tomorrow*

*FUCK YEAH!*

*McDonalds, FUCK YEAH!*

*Wal-Mart, FUCK YEAH!*

*The Gap, FUCK YEAH!*

*Baseball, FUCK YEAH!*

*NFL, FUCK, YEAH!*

*Rock and roll, FUCK YEAH!*

*Starbucks, FUCK YEAH!*

*The Internet, FUCK YEAH!*

*Slavery, FUCK YEAH!*

*Disney world, FUCK YEAH!*

*Porno, FUCK YEAH!*

*Valium, FUCK YEAH!*

*Reeboks, FUCK YEAH!*

*Fake Tits, FUCK YEAH!*

*Sushi, FUCK YEAH!*

*Taco Bell, FUCK YEAH!*

*Rodeos, FUCK YEAH!*

*Bed bath and beyond (Fuck yeah, Fuck yeah)...<sup>101</sup>*

*FUCK YEAH!*

I won't go through the entire list of paintings, titles, referents and lyrics here, suffice to say that these examples illustrate the intent and outcome of the naming devices employed. There is also a significant interest on my part in music as a medium, being a musician and songwriter myself in addition to a visual artist. Music has had a large impact on my aesthetics, ideas and worldviews. Here is a quote by US TV evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, as sampled and used in a song by the band Pop Will Eat Itself, which I think is particularly interesting in the discussion of media.

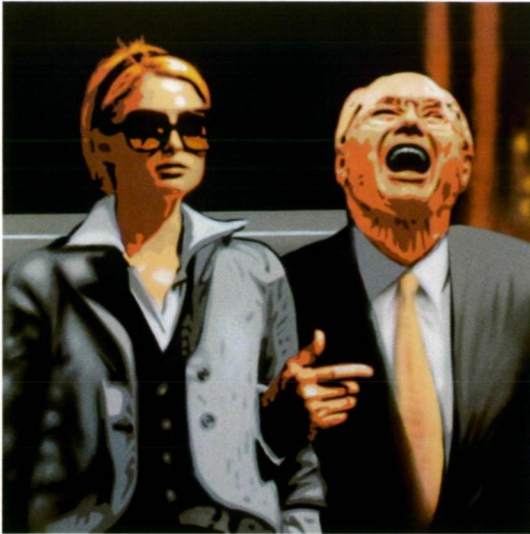
*"What is the truth about rock music? Music is a powerful and perhaps the most powerful medium in the world. Music. Plato says when the music of a society changes, the whole society will change. Aristotle, a contemporary of Plato's, says when music changes there should be laws to govern the nature and the character of that music. Lenin says that the best and the quickest way to undermine any society is through its music...Music, ladies and gentleman, is the gift of God. It was given to man to offer praises to God and to lift us up to him and to exalt Him to touch the tender recesses of our hearts and of our minds. Satan has taken music and he has*

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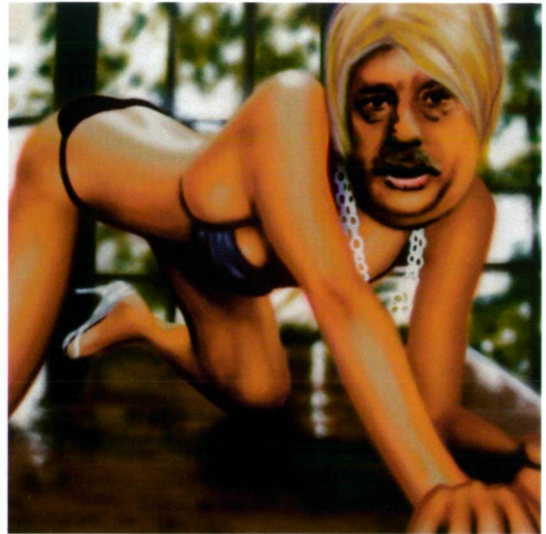
<sup>101</sup> Trey Parker, *America, Fuck Yeah!* from the movie soundtrack to *Team America*, Paramount Pictures, 2004



counterfeited it, convoluted it, twisted it, exploited it and now he's using it to hammer, hammer, hammer, hammer, hammer a message into the minds and the lifestyles of this generation."<sup>102</sup>



(fig.84) *Get the Girl, Kill the Baddies and Save the Entire Planet*, 2007



(fig.85) *Don't Cha (Wish Your Girlfriend Was Hot Like Me)*, 2007

The works in this series are also unified through the employment of Paris Hilton (US celebrity) as the primary *referent*. In the earlier works of this project, the *referents* (the political figures) were employed as *signifiers* of themselves (despite them *becoming* signifiers of the *media environment*). In these works, the images of Paris are employed as a metaphor, as a visual *decoy* (*obfuscation*). In addition to this, none of the paintings are based on 'reality' or *matters of fact*, they are fictitious depictions of absurd situations, which is again a departure from earlier works where each image is a news media reproduction, or a *matter of fact* employed in a *spatial* orchestration to indicate *matters of concern*. Here, the news media images are juxtaposed to create *new* matters of facts. There is also a hybrid of *orchestration*, employing *montage* techniques within each frame, and *spatial* orchestration from frame-to-frame to create an *environment*. In this *environment*, that which is seen (the hand painted or perceptual-realist renderings, most prominently of Paris Hilton) is what is intended to be considered to be 'true' or 'real'; however, as indicated above, this is a *decoy obfuscating* what is *known*. This orchestration

<sup>102</sup> Jimmy Swaggart sampled on the song *The Incredible PWEI vs The Moral Majority* by Pop Will Eat Itself (PWEI), taken from the album *Cure for Sanity*, Infectious Records, 1990

is an attempt to deconstruct the *political landscape* of the *media environment* itself, where what is seen (celebrity culture, consumer products, media headlines) obfuscates what is *known* (which is, for the most part, very little!).

### **Journal Entry, 17.10.06**

*"So what interests me is what we don't know. We can only ever know ourselves, somewhat – and everything else is removed, by degrees, from our direct experience, and therefore direct knowledge of. My art is about what I don't know. What we don't know. What is hidden from us."*

In this body of work, the *local* has become fused with the *global*. No distinction is made, from frame-to-frame and within frames, between Paris Hilton (US), Paul Lennon (Tasmania, fig.85), John Howard (Australia), Saddam Hussein (Iraq, fig.81) and the Pope (Vatican/Rome, fig.80) etc. All of these figures occupy the same 'place' at the same 'time', indicative of the *media environment*.

A large part of the stencilling in this body of work was executed using a technique that I have termed 'reductive stencilling'. I developed this technique in early 2007 for a project that I completed with Die Laughing Collective.<sup>103</sup> It involves the cutting of multi-layered stencils from a single piece of paper. The result of this process is that the 'stencil print' is a one off, as each piece is cut and then replaced and then cut again, the stencil falls apart. The benefit of this method is that it overcomes some of the limitations of a standard stencil. Normally with a stencil, one must be careful of areas 'dropping out'; that is, floating areas, or areas not connected to the rest of the image. This is usually solved through creating 'bridges' in a stencil, which can look clumsy and distort an image. With 'reductive stencilling' all parts of the stencil are employed, the parts that are cut as image, the 'negative' areas, and then all of those parts become masks for the next layer. This technique has allowed me to produce complex multi-layered stencils to a level of sophistication that would be relatively impossible with the standard method. This is not something the untrained eye would pick up on, and requires consideration of

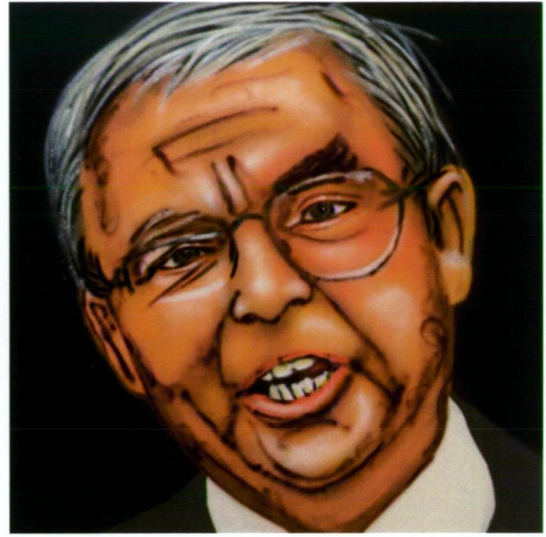
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<sup>103</sup> See Appendix I: a) *Die Laughing Collective*, for details.

the processes involved to produce each layer of colour, before it becomes apparent (when viewing the work).



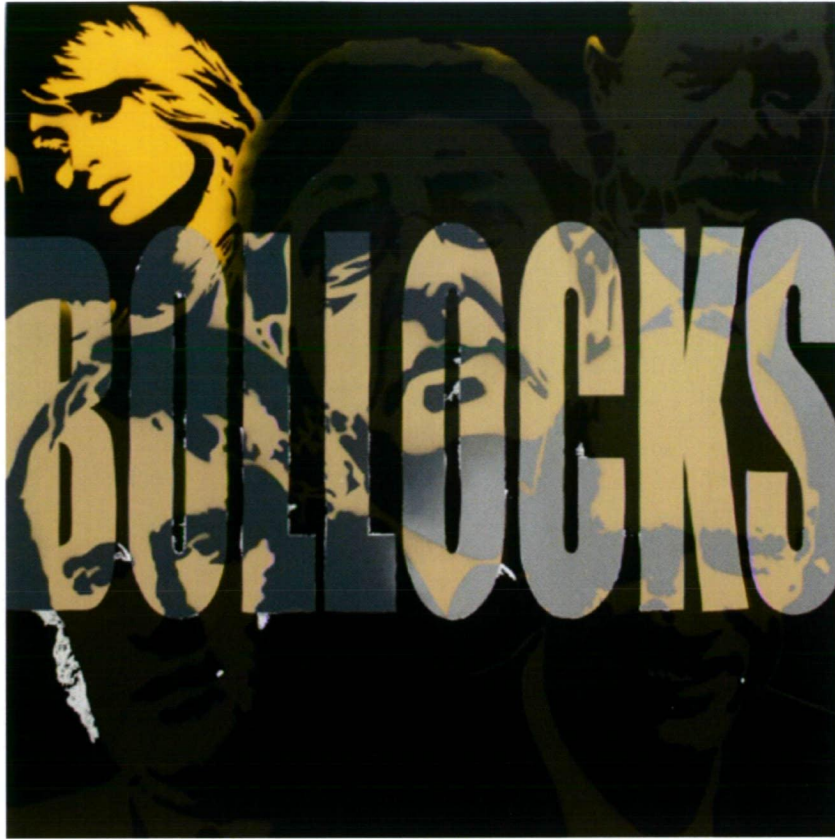
(fig.86) *Smells Like Gay Lennon*, 2007



(fig.87) *Turning Howardese I Think I'm Turning Howardese I Really Think So (or Jaundiced Eye)*, 2007

I also produced two 'hybrid portraits' as part of this series. These works are essentially an extension of the earlier work "*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*", employing a 'freehand' spray painting technique. *Smells Like Gay Lennon* (fig.86) fuses together political figure, Paul Lennon, with business figure, John Gay. The song title references the Nirvana song *Smells Like Teen Spirit* as well as the stench surrounding the proposed Tamar Valley Pulp Mill, orchestrated by these two men. *Turning Howardese...* (fig.87) combines an image of Kevin Rudd (then leader of opposition) with the eye of John Howard (then Prime Minister). The shift here is subtle, as are often political processes and *political spin*.





(fig.88) *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*, 2007 (depicted from top left clockwise are: Paris Hilton, John Gay, Paul Lennon, Peter Garrett and Malcolm Turnbull).

The final work in this series, *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* (fig.88), is the 'full stop' or the 'exclamation mark'. It depicts the main figures involved in supporting the proposed Gunns Ltd. Pulp Mill directly before the 2007 Federal Election, with the obvious exception of Paris Hilton. Written across the work, in homage to the Sex Pistols, is 'BOLLOCKS'.

*First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World* is a reprise of the formal techniques developed throughout the project, dealing with a broad range of *matters of concern*, from the local to the global. This body of work also represents the defining moment in a *contextual* shift in the Project; that is, from the *political* to the *media environment*.



## Chapter Four – Conclusion

In this project, I have developed a visual language engaged with contemporary dissent and critical opinion. This visual language is a refinement of those artistic methods that are associated with the 'street', primarily that of the spray can and the stencil. It has involved a mastering of the technique of stencilling, and the development of a new kind of 'realist shorthand' through freehand aerosol painting, as well as the introduction of a 'realist shorthand' technique with the brush. This technique of rendering figures in an accessible, recognisable and direct manner is employed in order to engage with the general public. The works *look* popular and familiar, and yet remain engaged with my *matters of concern*, with dissent and with critical opinion. This accessibility is essential to any success that the works may achieve in engaging with that audience.

I have developed a technique of stencilling that I have termed *form as content*, where I embody an idea or a concern within the formal elements of a stencil. In this project it has taken the form of *corruption*, a degenerative line in the cutting that mirrors my concerns in the content. This technique has pushed me to develop complex, multi-layered and intricate stencil design and cutting. I think that the most successful resolution of this idea is the work "*The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties*".

I have also developed a 'reductive stencil'; a form of multi-layer stencilling that employs a single piece of paper, continuously reducing itself as each layer is cut. This technique has been employed to enable the production of 'one offs' and as a way of bypassing some of the limits of a standard stencil. This technique is exemplified in the work *America, Fuck Yeah!*.

In addition to the development of an easily accessible representational mode, I have employed media icons and popular culture references to 'grab' the viewer; that is, to generate an immediate pull through referencing the everyday, the recognisable. I want the audience to immediately 'get'

something from an image without needing a post-modernist ‘code’ book to do so. I want the viewer to bypass the question “what is it?” and jump straight to “Hey! That’s Paul Lennon’s head on a woman’s body!” – and *then* ask the question “Hang on, Why?” This mode of operation is especially evident in the later works that employ the figure of Paris Hilton (an instantly recognisable pop icon, loved and hated with an equal passion), as well as in the work *Terry Hicks*.

The political/social referencing in this project is deliberately ambiguous. The viewer is placed in an essentially arbitrary and subjective point of view, a state of suspended judgement. Even I, as the maker, have a relatively ambiguous relationship with the content of the work. It was never my intention to make work that ‘pushes’ a message on the viewer (ala propaganda). It has been my intention to open up the areas of my concern through proposing visual and contextual ironies. These ironies, often in the form of juxtapositions, occur as both deliberately planned and executed ideas (as in the series *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*), and as intuitive ‘play’ (as in the series *First We Take Paris...*). Despite this *irony*, and the apparent ‘humour’ in some of the works, the works are *serious* in their intent and resolution.

In developing artwork that is engaged with political issues, I have evolved imagery directly from the mass media. Due to this, I have come to review my engagement with political issues as an engagement with *media*. Therefore, the premise of developing a visual language engaged with dissent and critical opinion holds true, though the context of that critique and dissent has shifted from the political arena to the *media environment*. The work produced in this project has become increasingly *part* of this *media environment* through an engagement with the mass media (the Internet, magazines, newspapers) to facilitate the dissemination of the work. This dissemination of the work, as images *within* the mass media, is central to the thesis. Appendix II details instances of my images appearing in various media during the course of this project. This has been a *deliberate* pursuit of these outcomes.

I have also deliberately engaged with the *local* in this project. This is a new area of investigation for me, and has proved to be one of the most significant,

as evidenced in the work "*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*". Through engaging with local matters of concern, in an accessible and realist formal manner, there was an immediate and strong response from both the media and the public. Several 'political' and 'business' figures also contacted me with the intention of buying the 'portraits' of their mates or nemesis... an ironic development in itself. This public interest, and a certain demonstrated level of awareness by the 'big end of town', has led to the understanding that engaging with the *local*, through art, can lead to meaningful interaction *with* that local community. Local people care about local issues. Marshall MacLuhan's '*global village*' is still a way off, it would seem.

In this exegesis, I have not entered into a discussion about art vs. politics. It is a well-documented debate that argues about the merits of art engaged with political issues, and whether or not art should/could be political. It is my view, as an artist pursuing political issues through art, that this debate is redundant; it is akin to debating whether or not a mechanic should/could work on motorcycles or just stick to cars. Art has been engaged in politics ever since such things were designated to be 'art' and/or 'politics'. I think that it is convenient for the establishment to make the argument that art should not engage itself with politics because it is to their advantage that politics exist as a specialist field, where no one comments on political issues other than politicians and sanctioned political commentators. My opinion is that political issues belong to everybody, and that it is through everyday engagement in politics, by *everyone*, that meaningful solutions to problems will be found – not through the contrivances of politicians, who will deliberately drag out and obfuscate problems to suit hidden agendas and vested interests. For these reasons, I have finally excised this discussion from the exegesis<sup>104</sup>. I pursue political issues in art because I feel personally engaged with those issues. I do not need to debate the merit of what I do, as that debate could be applied to any endeavour in life, and is ultimately self defeating and pointless.

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<sup>104</sup> This issue of 'art and politics' was often debated/discussed in critiques/forums, and discussed with my supervisor etc. and was written about at some length in an earlier version of the exegesis.



There is a similar discussion that exists about the *effectiveness* of political art; that is, theorists and political commentators arguing about why political art cannot be effective, or how it merely ‘points the finger’ rather than offering solutions. Again, I consider this argument to be moot. It is a gross generalisation of a field of endeavour that does not actually seek to *be* politics *per se*, and so cannot be judged against *actual* ‘policy making’ in terms of effectiveness. Here is an example of what a commentator in a national newspaper, John Armstrong, proposes as a measure of art against the practicalities of politics:

*Political art can describe what is wrong, it can exhort us to action, but it doesn't go where political problems now lie. These problems have to do with the practical business of balancing conflicting interests, of managing unquantifiable risks and retaining public support while doing so.*<sup>105</sup>

A point that I make several times in this exegesis is that issues of politics are all occurring *within* the *media environment*, and that they are connected in very literal ways: war and the control of resources; religion and ideological politics; climate change and economics; technology and war; economics and politics and so on. So these shifting and interconnected fields are operating instantly and simultaneously, and are presented in the *media environment* using visual and textual imagery. This is where I believe visual art has a unique role: *to present new and alternative ways of understanding* this pervasive yet elusive *media environment*, rather than offering a panacea of policymaking that will resolve an issue, nor to “*explain how to put things right*”<sup>106</sup> as John Armstrong suggests. We need an expanded understanding of the *overall situation* in which the human condition is currently located, not explanations from artists about how to manage fiscal risk or explain how tough it is to be Mr. President! Art is a facet of attaining this expanded understanding, and I strongly believe that it is a facet that cannot be overlooked (which seems to be its current fate). Art will not solve the world’s problems, but it will, as it always has, show us ourselves; aiding us in understanding the situation in which we all co-exist.

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<sup>105</sup> John Armstrong, *Storming the Barricades... with a Paint Brush*, Weekend Australian, Review, June 9-10 2007, pp. 18-19

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p.19

I am passionate about the world and its affairs; I *do* care about what happens to us, as humans, and the rest of the world, animate and inanimate. This project has been an exploration and a mastering of the techniques and methods that I can employ to express these concerns in an accessible visual way, and it has opened up a multitude of possibilities for future directions. My matters of concern are growing, the context in which they occur is transforming, and the marching multitude of referents continuing... in an endless procession.

## **Appendix I**

In addition to the works presented in the third chapter, this Appendix details other works that have been completed as part of this project, including collaborative works with a) Die Laughing Collective (Jamin, Paicey & Empire); b) additional works by myself; and c) and community works.

## a) DIE LAUGHING COLLECTIVE

Die Laughing Collective (est. 2004) is a creative partnership between three Tasmanian artists: Paicey, Empire and myself (under the moniker Jamin). Together we have produced a number of large paintings, many collaborative street works, and have taken part in a number of local and national events, demonstrations and commissioned opportunities, including the *Art for Public Buildings Scheme* in Tasmania (2005).

During the course of this project, there have been several activities that the Collective has engaged with, and these are detailed here.

### MAY'S (Die Laughing Collective), 2006



Die Laughing Collective, *May's Lane Panel*, 2006, enamel spray paint on board, 300 x 420cm  
May Lane, Sydney

*MAY's* is a 'street art' project in May Lane in Sydney's inner west. Each month they invite street artists to paint a 3 x 4m panel. Die Laughing were selected for February 2006. This painting recaps motifs from all of our practices at that time, essentially a collaborative montage. During the week spent painting



this work, we also painted a large amount of the surrounding laneway, which was already home to a significant amount of street art – in essence adding to an even *larger* collaborative montage that was already occurring.



May Lane, February 2006, various artists, large characters by Die Laughing Collective.

## CATCH THE FIRE! (after John Howard)



Die Laughing Collective, *Catch the Fire! (after John Howard)*, 2007, enamel spray paint on aluminium, 240 x 240cm

*Catch The Fire! (after John Howard)* was created in response to an opportunity to include work by the Collective in the exhibition *Selected Cuts*, as part of the 2007 Adelaide Fringe Festival. The work is an act of both social and political comment/protest; a response to events occurring in Australia around that time centred on resurgent State sanctioned Nationalism<sup>107</sup> and racially motivated violence.<sup>108</sup> As a deliberate move away from our somewhat established practice of stencil montage, we produced this work from a staged photo shoot on Australia Day 2007. Depicted in the work are the three members of the Collective. This work was relatively ground breaking in terms of stencilling, as we pioneered a method of 'reductive stencilling'; that is, every layer of the stencil (approx. 50 layers) has been cut from a single, large piece of cardboard. As each layer was sprayed, it would be taped back into

<sup>107</sup> This was epitomised by Australian Prime Minister John Howard's speech to the fundamentalist right wing Christian group 'Catch the Fire Ministries' for their Australia Day DVD.

<sup>108</sup> Specifically the race riots of Cronulla Beach, Sydney, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2005.

the stencil and the next layer cut, the result of which was a reduction in paper wastage, a 'once off' stencil (as it is essentially destroyed in the process) and a level of physical, collaborative interaction beyond that of our 'montage' works. This was also the first painting in which 'freehand' aerosol painting was incorporated into the background. As the instigator of these techniques, I went on to explore them further in the series *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*.

Here is the statement that accompanied the work:

*Australia Day, 2007... West Hobart, Tasmania... Die Laughing Collective were enjoying a peaceful barbie in the suburban sun when they became painfully aware of John Howard's speech on the Catch the Fire Ministries Australia Day DVD. Clouds began to gather and very soon a darker mood had settled on the trio with furtive glances and closed, suspicious faces peering from behind empty beer bottles. It came upon two members of the Collective suddenly! Flags were waved! Jeers were made! Oh, the intolerance! Luckily a photographer was on hand to capture what followed, and here it is, in all its patriotic glory!*

***Die Laughing Collective, 2007 - Be kind to your neighbors.***



## SYRUP NIGHTCLUB, Hobart, 2007



Die Laughing Collective, *Syrup Nightclub*, spray enamel paint on wall, dimensions variable, 2007

Die Laughing Collective were commissioned to paint the walls of Syrup Nightclub, Hobart, in 2007. We painted a variety of characters, ranging from pirates and skeletons to laughing fat men.





## b) ADDITIONAL WORKS

### IN HEAVEN EVERYTHING IS FINE



*In Heaven Everything Is Fine*, 2006, enamel spray paint on aluminium plate, 90 x 60cm

This work was completed just before the MFA commenced, and was a response to the heart attack of Ariel Sharon and the recent death of Yasser Arafat, leaders of two warring parties. The title refers to a song (of the same name) by the 90's alternative band, the Pixies. The title and the proximity of the two figures is an ironical comment on fundamentalist spiritual convictions.

## MY WORK HERE IS DONE



*My Work Here Is Done*, 2006, spray enamel and household enamel paint on MDF, 100 x 100cm

*My Work Here Is Done* was appropriated from a pre-election Liberal billboard advertisement that condemned the record of the Tasmanian Lennon Government. The billboard image, depicting Paul Lennon, had been constructed using drop out tones (ala stencilling) and so I reproduced it as is, though on a smaller scale and without the text of the original. This work was the first of what would prove to be many paintings of the Tasmanian Premier.

## UNTITLED (SELF PORTRAIT)



*Young Fidel*, 2006, spray enamel and household enamel paint on aluminium, 120 x 120cm

This work was produced at the same time as *Where The Kickbacks Are*, and is a self-portrait. Originally untitled, this work was exhibited and sold by the Stencil Festival at *Art Sydney '06*. What is interesting about this work, and somewhat ironic, is that the person who bought the work asked the seller “who is the painting of?”, and was subsequently informed (innocently and incorrectly) that it depicted a young Fidel Castro. When I received the sales advice slip for my “Young Fidel Castro” painting, I was quite amused and so retitled the work *Young Fidel*. This incident was a working example of what I had proposed in my Honours project of 2005; which was, the slippages between identities as portrayed by the mass media.



## John Howard Drawing / Installation



(fig. ) Installation: Drawing of John Howard & stencils of Zarqawi, Hicks and Howard, FirstDraft Gallery, Sydney, 2007



(fig.2 & 3) details of above. Drawing approx. 3 x 3m

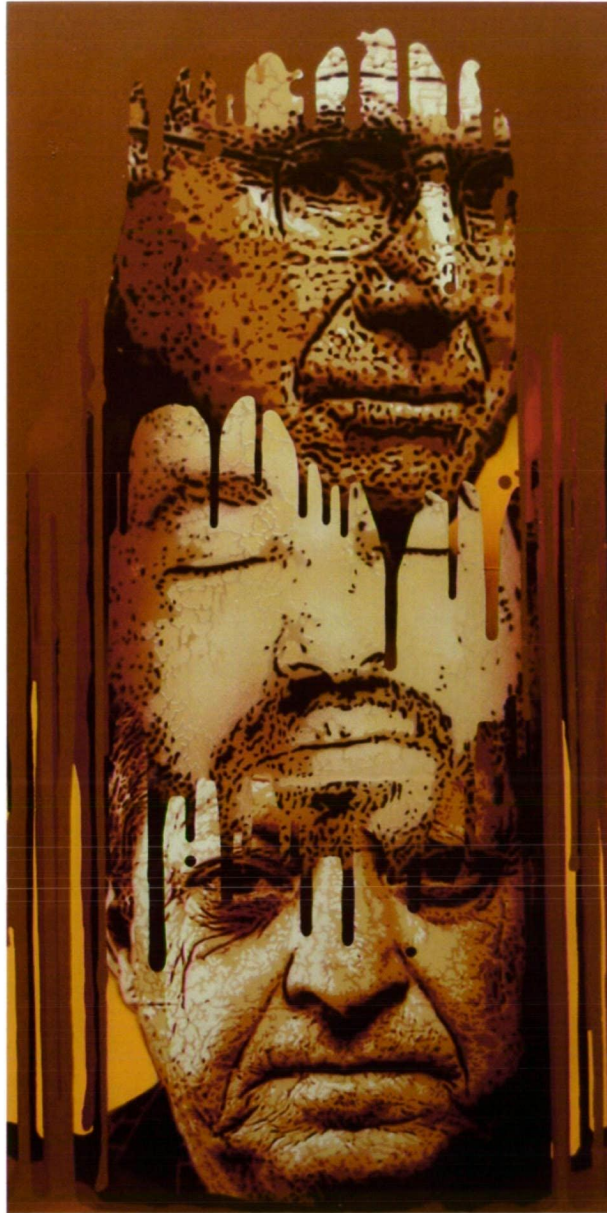
This work was produced at FirstDraft Gallery, Sydney, as a result of an opportunity through INFLIGHT ARI in May 2007. With the federal election looming that year, it was my intention to paint a large portrait of then Prime Minister, John Howard. The idea was for the surface to be decaying with drips and cracks, a continuation of the *form as content* idea, as well as the idea of John Howard's 'public mask' cracking apart (as was beginning to occur in/through the media). However, as I began to sketch the dimensions and proportions of Howard's face onto the wall with an HB pencil, I became



immersed in blocking in areas and indicating tonal gradations etc. until I reached the point, a few hours later, where I realised that I had almost completed a *drawing*. Standing back and looking at the work I decided that it would remain as a drawing. This was a significant moment for two reasons. One was that I had not exhibited a drawing before, and so it was somewhat experimental and risk taking, and the other was that the drawing's finish, its soft surface of planes and gradations, had the opposite effect of what my original intention was. What I had planned as a decomposing, degenerative surface ended up as a softly polished, clean surface that was more 'pretty' than 'ugly'. In addition, Howard's eyes, distorted in size by the vagaries of my hand, became almost puppy-like. He looks sweet, innocent and beguiling.

In addition to the drawing, I stencilled the images of Howard, Hicks and Zarqawi onto the gallery walls. This grouping of these three figures leads to another work, *Melting Moments*.

## MELTING MOMENTS



(fig. ) *Melting Moments*, 2007, exhibited at *Urban Skins*, Pinnacles Gallery, QLD, 2007

This work is a montage of John Howard, Terry Hicks and Al Zargawi, and a continuation of the grouping of these figures that occurred in the *FirstDraft* installation. The dripping effect of one stencil 'bleeding' into the next has been created through the use of liquid latex, a technique developed in my Honours work of 2005.

## THE LAST JOHN HOWARD



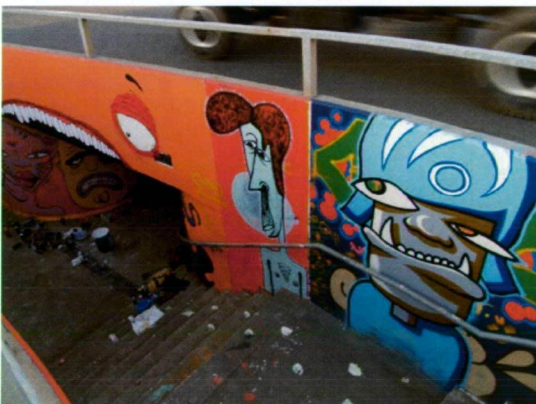
This painting was produced on the walls of CAST Gallery, Hobart, for the 2007 *CAST Members Exhibition*. Subsequent to John Howard's election defeat in November 2007, this painting is intended as the last one I will do of this political figure. It features a 'sulking' John Howard surrounded by laughing figures from global politics. The bottom left hand figure is myself.



## c) COMMUNITY WORK

In addition to producing my own work, and work with the Die Laughing Collective, I also engage in community-based projects. Most often, these projects take the form of workshops and demonstrations, usually with school groups or community youth centres. Outlined here are several projects undertaken during the course of this research.

### Young Town Primary, Launceston, 2006



This project was completed on-and-off over several months with the Die Laughing Collective and Young Town Primary School in Launceston, Tasmania. The idea behind the project was to transform a lifeless, vandalised underpass near the school into a bright, welcoming space that would encourage students to make use of, when needing to cross the road. At that



time children were preferring to run across a busy main road rather than use the underpass. Several of the characters in this mural were conceived by Grade 4 students, and were drawn up to scale by us, and then hand painted by the students. Other characters are the creations of Die Laughing Collective.

### **Cosgrove High, Glenorchy, 2006**



This project was part of a one week ‘residency’ across three northern suburbs schools in Glenorchy (Tasmania). Each member of Die Laughing Collective was assigned a school and a group of students to work with, demonstrating and teaching the skills of stencilling, aerosol painting and image assemblage (montage). The resulting works were displayed at the Works Festival (a youth festival in Glenorchy) and later put on permanent display at their respective schools. For my part of the project, I encouraged students to collect images that they responded to, that meant something in their lives, and then assisted them in developing these images into stencils via computer programs such as Photoshop, and then through enlargement, drawing and cutting processes.

We considered the composition as a group, and I encouraged students to choose colours that complimented the composition/placement of images.

### **Bridging the Gap, Hobart, 2007**

In this project I worked with a Community and Cultural Development organization (CCD), *Kick Start Arts*. My role was to develop the artwork and technical resolution of producing a 'live' stencilling wall as part of a theatre performance by students at Elizabeth College, Hobart. The play, called *Bridging the Gap*, was concerned with issues of race, youth, integration and acceptance within contemporary society. I developed imagery for the play that would coincide with various 'acts', and then led several workshops in image development and stencil cutting at the College. I then developed a non-aerosol based method of painting stencils, using polyurethane stencils and roller paint, to enable 'street art' actors to produce the 'mural' during the performances.

**Woodleigh School, Gippsland, Victoria, 2007**

This project was a one-week residency at the leafy Woodleigh School in Gippsland, Victoria, organised by the co-ordinator of the *Stencil Festival*, J.D. This project involved a series of presentations to art students about my work, followed by several days of image development, stencil cutting and ultimately aerosol painting. I encouraged students to source images that would reflect the surrounds of their school, a rural bush setting, and that would reflect the quality of life that they enjoyed. The student produced work onto small squares of aluminium, which were later attached to various areas of the school grounds.



## Bowen Road Primary Mural, Moonah, 2007



I was approached by Bowen Road Primary School to design and implement a mural based on drawings developed by students ranging in age from Prep to Grade 6. I invited the other members of Die Laughing Collective to be a part of this project, and together we designed, and then painted this mural, over one week, on the main street-facing wall of the School. The mural has been painted employing 'freehand' aerosol techniques; interpreting the students drawings into more sophisticated renderings. The aim of this project was to create a professional looking mural that still contained an element of the 'child-like'.



## Appendix II

### **a) Instances of my images appearing on the Internet, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

Although this list is not exhaustive, it provides as many instances of images appearing on the Internet as I was able to track down. The nature of the Internet is that images are linked to, and re-posted, in a variety of places that are often only discovered through chance. Where possible I have included viewing statistics. These sites were checked 20.01.08.

1. **www.jamin.com.au** (for the 12 month period, Feb 07 –Jan 08)  
approx. 29,500 unique visits and 313,500 hits. Website contains approx 160 images.
2. **www.dielLaughing.com.au** (for the 12 month period, Feb 07 –Jan 08)  
approx. 42,000 unique visits and 500,000 hits. Website contains upwards of 500 images of artworks by myself and other members of Die Laughing Collective appearing on the street, as well as studio work.
3. **www.stencilrevolution.com/photopost/showgallery.php?cat=500&ppuser=102279**  
approx. 24 images, approx. 40,000 views
4. **www.stencilrevolution.com/photopost/showgallery.php?cat=500&ppuser=8183**  
approx. 60 images, approx. 70,000 views
5. **www.inflightart.com.au/past/2007/jamin.html**  
5 images
6. **www.myspace.com/jamin\_art**  
29 images, approx. 2900 views
7. **www.myspace.com/dielLaughingcollective**  
17 images + 2 videos, approx. 1300 views
8. **www.youtube.com/profile?user=dielLaughingcrew**  
2 videos, approx. 2100 views
9. **www.redbubble.com/people/jamin**  
3 images, approx. 1200 views
10. **www.noise.net/dielLaughing**  
6 images, approx. 5000 views

11. **[www.talentedatabase.com/channels/1-Art/profiles/1052401-Jamin](http://www.talentedatabase.com/channels/1-Art/profiles/1052401-Jamin)**  
4 images, approx. 150 views (since December 2007)
12. **[www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/stuart/StudentArt/ast\\_id/27597](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/stuart/StudentArt/ast_id/27597)**  
12 images
13. **[www.criteriongallery.com.au](http://www.criteriongallery.com.au)**  
10 images

The following list is of websites containing either 1 image or an article referring to my work. These sites were checked 20.01.08.

14. **[www.flickr.com/photos/pinxit/1850189708/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/pinxit/1850189708/)**
15. **[room11blog.blogspot.com/2006/10/pecha-kucha-night-2.htm](http://room11blog.blogspot.com/2006/10/pecha-kucha-night-2.htm)**
16. **[www.abc.net.au/triplej/topshelf/gallery/stencil.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/topshelf/gallery/stencil.htm)**
17. **[www.medleymag.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=33](http://www.medleymag.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=33)**
18. **[www.artreview.com.au/art/profiles/artists/urban-edge-tas-feature.aspx](http://www.artreview.com.au/art/profiles/artists/urban-edge-tas-feature.aspx)**
19. **[www.lonelyplanet.com/blogs/travel\\_blog/2007/05/melbourne-stencil-festival-07.html](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/blogs/travel_blog/2007/05/melbourne-stencil-festival-07.html)**
20. **[www.artshub.com.au/au/news.asp?sc=&sld=158158](http://www.artshub.com.au/au/news.asp?sc=&sld=158158)**
21. **[www.tumejorguia.com/?cmd=buscavideo&q=240cm&search=tag](http://www.tumejorguia.com/?cmd=buscavideo&q=240cm&search=tag)**
22. **[www.kolahstudio.com/Underground/index.php?m=200706&paged=2](http://www.kolahstudio.com/Underground/index.php?m=200706&paged=2)**
23. **[www.stomptheban.com/melbourne-stencil-art.htm](http://www.stomptheban.com/melbourne-stencil-art.htm)**
24. **[www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/pinestreet/Gallery/Archives/default.html](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/pinestreet/Gallery/Archives/default.html)**
25. **[www.theage.com.au/news/arts-reviews/melbourne-stencil-festival/2007/05/11/1178390534935.html](http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts-reviews/melbourne-stencil-festival/2007/05/11/1178390534935.html)**
26. **[www.stencilfestival.com/](http://www.stencilfestival.com/)**
27. **[www.pinxit.com.au/artists.php](http://www.pinxit.com.au/artists.php)**
28. **[www.jugglers.org.au/content/blogcategory/3/20/](http://www.jugglers.org.au/content/blogcategory/3/20/)**
29. **[www.thuringowa.qld.gov.au/news/index?media\\_id=1202](http://www.thuringowa.qld.gov.au/news/index?media_id=1202)**
30. **[www.hellavate.net/new/](http://www.hellavate.net/new/)**
31. **[www.hunterislandpress.org.au/sub/2006/01/](http://www.hunterislandpress.org.au/sub/2006/01/)**
32. **[www.watim.com](http://www.watim.com)**
33. **[www.pica.org.au/hatched/hatch06/biographies.shtml](http://www.pica.org.au/hatched/hatch06/biographies.shtml)**
34. **[www.woostercollective.com/2006/04/09-week/](http://www.woostercollective.com/2006/04/09-week/)**
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40. [www.utas.edu.au/accommodation/Exhibition%20Catalogue.pdf](http://www.utas.edu.au/accommodation/Exhibition%20Catalogue.pdf)
41. [www.tas.gov.au/tasmaniaonline/](http://www.tas.gov.au/tasmaniaonline/)
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52. [www.commdesign.rmit.edu.au/wiki/index.php/2ndYearMediaReadings](http://www.commdesign.rmit.edu.au/wiki/index.php/2ndYearMediaReadings)
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54. [www.gridskipper.com/travel/melbourne/melbourne-sydney-stencil-festival-2006-175216.php](http://www.gridskipper.com/travel/melbourne/melbourne-sydney-stencil-festival-2006-175216.php)



## **b) Image Search Results on the Internet**

Following is a list of image search results using the popular “Google” search engine. Results indicate where images of my artworks appear when a particular search phrase is entered. I have tried to keep the search phrases as generic as possible (i.e. I have not added ‘stencil’, ‘art’ or ‘jamin’ to the phrases which would skew the results). Also, the search is done with ‘safe search off’: similar results can be obtained with ‘safe search on’. These results were checked 20.01.08.

1. **“Tasmania explore the possibilities”** (official Tasmanian slogan)  
**#1,2,4,6,7,8,9** of 14,300 results
2. **“Brian Green Tasmania”**  
**#1** of 52,400 results
3. **“John White Tasmania”**  
**#1** of 115,000 results
4. **“Edmund Rouse”**  
**#1** of 18,200 results
5. **“Terry Hicks”**  
**#3 & #4** of 169,000 results
6. **“John Gay Tasmania”**  
**#3 & #4** of 38,000 results
7. **“John Gay gunns”**  
**#8** of 4,250 results
8. **“Paul Lennon”**  
**#9** of 2,020,000 results (the number of results is so high because ‘paul’ and ‘lennon’ are both part of the names of Beatles band members)
9. **“street art melbourne”**  
**#10** of 324,000 results

10. **"Robin Gray"**  
#11 of 833,000 results
11. **"exclusive brethren"**  
#17 of 74,400 results
12. **"John Gay"**  
#18 of 7,370,000 results (and the first image of the *Tasmanian* John Gay)
13. **"Brian Green"**  
#20 of 7,430,000 results (and the first image of the *Tasmanian* Brian Green)
14. **"political stencil art"**  
#29 of 32,200 results
15. **"John Howard"**  
#52 of 10,500,000 results

## c) Articles in the Media / Publications

### On the Internet:

1. The Devonport Times, 2007  
[http://cms.dcc.tas.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/BCEE893F-8DEC-4A62-8CF5-EF0F023CC227/2939/DevTimesSept071\\_16.pdf](http://cms.dcc.tas.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/BCEE893F-8DEC-4A62-8CF5-EF0F023CC227/2939/DevTimesSept071_16.pdf)
2. Medley Mag, 2007  
[www.medleymag.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=33](http://www.medleymag.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=33)
3. The Melbourne Stencil Festival, 2007  
<http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts-reviews/melbourne-stencil-festival/2007/05/11/1178390534935.html>
4. The Program, *J Arts Crew: First We Take Paris*, Jennifer Hopper, 10.09.07,  
<http://www.theprogram.net.au/featuresSub.asp?id=2808>
5. Tasmanian Times, 2007  
<http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php?/weblog/article/first-we-take-paris-then-we-take-the-world/>
6. Tasmanian Times, 2007  
<http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php?/weblog/article/jamin>
7. We Are The Image Makers Issue 10 - Feature and interview, [www.watim.com](http://www.watim.com)

### In print media:

8. *First We Take Paris The We Take the World* Catalogue, text by Scott Cotterell, Devonport: Devonport Regional Gallery, ISBN 978-0-9775913-6-7, 2007
9. *Uncommissioned Art: An A-Z of Australian Graffiti* Christine Dew, Melbourne University Publishing, 2007
10. *Die Laughing Collective, shaking you awake* Chris Delaney, *Acclaim Magazine*, Issue #8, Aug 2007, pp 72-73, [www.acclaimmag.com](http://www.acclaimmag.com), 2007
11. *Intimidating exhibition sure to draw a reaction* Simon Bevilacqua, *Sunday Tasmanian*, 25.3.07, p. 11, 2007
12. *Have Brush Will Travel* Ted Snell, *The Australian*, 3-4.6.06, Review p. 18-19, 2006
13. *Perfect Hatch* Zebra Magazine, May Issues 249, p. 13 & cover, 2006
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## **Websites:**

The following list is a sample of some of the many websites I have visited, relevant to the project, which would number in the hundreds if I were to list them all.

Numerous 'hard news' websites, including:

- [www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au)
- [www.news.com.au/mercury](http://www.news.com.au/mercury)
- [www.theaustralian.news.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au)
- [www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)
- etc.

Alternative 'news' websites:

- [www.tasmaniatimes.com](http://www.tasmaniatimes.com)
- [www.tasmedia.org](http://www.tasmedia.org)
- [www.themonthly.com.au](http://www.themonthly.com.au)
- [www.crikey.com.au](http://www.crikey.com.au)
- [www.sourcewatch.org](http://www.sourcewatch.org)
- etc.

Graffiti & 'street art' related websites:

- [www.stencilrevolution.com.au](http://www.stencilrevolution.com.au)
- [www.woostercollective.com.au](http://www.woostercollective.com.au)

## List of Illustrations

### Chapter One: The Central Argument

1. Benjamin Kluss, *Common Ground*, installation view, BUS Gallery, Melbourne
2. Benjamin Kluss, *First We Take Paris then We Take the World*, installation view, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport.
3. *Australian Government newspaper ad*, sourced from:  
[http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/6BF09B94-421D-4074-8873-36232467FA8F/0/Adv\\_MythUnder18.pdf](http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/6BF09B94-421D-4074-8873-36232467FA8F/0/Adv_MythUnder18.pdf)
4. Benjamin Kluss, *Terry Hicks*, 2006, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 55 x 55cm
5. Image scanned from the *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 2006.
6. Benjamin Kluss, *The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties...*, 2006, spray enamel and household enamel paint on aluminium, 120 x 120cm

### Chapter Two: Contexts

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16. John Heartfield, *ADOLF THE SUPERMAN: Swallows gold and spouts junk*, AIZ 11, Number 29, 17 July 1932, Page 675. Sourced from: [www.intentional.co.uk](http://www.intentional.co.uk)
17. Hannah Hoch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the First Epoch of the Weimar Beer-Belly Culture*, 1919. Sourced from: [www.arthistoryarchive.com](http://www.arthistoryarchive.com)
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20. Hannah Höch, *Dada-Ernst*, 1920-21, photographic montage. Sourced from: <http://bama.ua.edu>
21. Hannah Höch, *Peasant Wedding Couple*, 1931, photographic montage. Sourced from: [www.lensculture.com](http://www.lensculture.com)
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24. Gordon Bennett, *Notes to Basquiat (the coming of the light)*, 2001, synthetic polymer paint on canvas 152.0 x 152.0 cm. Sourced from: [www.ngv.vic.gov.au](http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)
25. Gordon Bennett, *Camouflage #7*, 2003, acrylic on linen, 182.5 x 152cm. Sourced from: [www.ngv.vic.gov.au](http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)
26. Elizabeth Daniels, *Shepard Fairey*, date undisclosed, photograph. Sourced from the artist's website: [www.elizabethdanielsphotography.com](http://www.elizabethdanielsphotography.com)
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28. Shepard Fairey, *Toxic Dept*, 2007, mixed media installation, 11'6" x 16'. Sourced from the artists website: [www.obeygiant.com](http://www.obeygiant.com)

29. Diego Revira, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934, fresco at Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico. Sourced from: [www.abcgallery.com](http://www.abcgallery.com)
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32. Geoff Parr, *Black Hawks Pyramid*, 1996, digital print. Scanned from:
33. Geoff Parr, *Blue Tier Muse*, 2006, digital print. Scanned from:
34. Geoff Parr, *Age*, 1984, silk screen onto newsprint in wire frames, 7 units each 70 x 54cm. Sourced from exhibition catalogue: *Periscope: a view from the original Lake Pedder*.
35. J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1996 (Tasmanian Premier, Ray Groom) Book One, photo 18. Scanned from: John Voss, *Photographic Representation and Veracity in the Australian Political Arena: PhD Exegesis*, p. 126
36. Ray Groom, Parliamentary photo, photographer unknown. Sourced from: [www.parliament.tas.gov.au](http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au)
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38. John Howard, Parliamentary photo circa. 1996, photographer unknown. Sourced from: [www.nndb.com](http://www.nndb.com)
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40. J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1996 (L-R, Greg Turnbull and PM Keating, press conference, Hobart) Book Two, photo 10. Scanned from: John Voss, *Photographic Representation and Veracity in the Australian Political Arena: PhD Exegesis*, p. 134
41. J.J. Voss, *Untitled*, 1998 (Media operatives, [centre middle ground] Premier Jim Bacon and Honey Bacon) Book Two, photo 11. Scanned from: John Voss, *Photographic Representation and Veracity in the Australian Political Arena: PhD Exegesis*, p. 134
42. Megan Keating, *Invasion*, 2001, red paper. Scanned from: Megan Keating, *The Space of the Screen & Contemporary Ambivalence: PhD Exegesis*.

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45. Megan Keating, *And Then There Were None - Flight Pattern #109*, 2003, paper cut, 58 x 62cm. Image courtesy the artist and Criterion Gallery.
46. Megan Keating, *Smoke*, 2004, paper cut, 72 x 110cm. Image courtesy the artist and Criterion Gallery.
47. Megan Keating, *Clear and Pink Danger*, 2004, oil and gesso on canvas 125 x 110cm. Image courtesy the artist and Criterion Gallery.
48. Megan Keating, *And Then There Were None - Friendly Fire*, 2003, oil on canvas 58.5 x 58.5cm. Image courtesy the artist and Criterion Gallery.
49. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 x 776cm. Sourced from: [www.mgf-kulmbach.de](http://www.mgf-kulmbach.de)

### Chapter Three: The Development of the Work

All of the following works are attributed to myself, Benjamin Kluss, unless indicated otherwise.

50. *Badgers & Hawks* (detail), 2005, spray enamel & synthetic polymer paint on MDF, 240 x 120cm
51. *Dawn of the Golden Age*, 2005, spray enamel & synthetic polymer paint on MDF, 240 x 240cm
52. *Sedition*, 2005, spray enamel & synthetic polymer paint on MDF, 240 x 360cm (6 panels)
53. *Common Ground*, 2006, installation view, Melbourne, spray enamel on wall plus cardboard stencils, dimensions variable, BUS Gallery (Melbourne)
54. *Saddam Hussein* (ex. *President of Iraq*), detail from *Common Ground*, spray enamel paint on wall, approx. 120 x 120cm, 2006
55. *John Howard* (Current Prime Minister of Australia, ex. *Young Liberal*), detail from *Common Ground*, spray enamel paint on wall, approx. 120 x 120cm, 2006
56. *David Hicks* (Our Man in Afghanistan), detail from *Common Ground*, spray enamel paint on wall, approx. 120 x 120cm, 2006

57. *Trevor Flugge (Our Man In Iraq)*, Common Ground, 2006, detail from *Common Ground*, spray enamel paint on wall, approx. 120 x 120cm, 2006
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59. *Where the Kick Backs Are (after Maurice Sendak)*, 2006, spray enamel and household enamel on aluminium, 120 x 240cm
60. *Where the Kickbacks Are*, Goulborne Street, Hobart, 2006
61. *Even Bad Guys Look Good When They're Dead*, 2006, spray enamel on canvas, 100 x 100cm
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63. *"The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties"*, 2006, household enamel and spray enamel paint on aluminium, 120m x 120cm
64. News media photograph of Paul Lennon, photographer unknown, 2006. Sourced from the *Mercury* newspaper, Hobart, 17.07.06.
65. *Sedition*, 2005, detail (see fig.52)
66. *"The suggestions were well received by the opposition parties"*, 2006, (detail), household enamel and spray enamel paint on aluminium, 120m x 120cm
67. *Terry Hicks*, 2006, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 55 x 55cm.
68. *Terry Hicks*, *Weekend Australian Magazine*, circa. September 2006.
69. *John Howard*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 55 x 55cm.
70. *Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*, 2007, Installation view, INFLIGHT Gallery, Hobart
71. *Edmund Rouse*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 120 x 120cm
72. *Robin Gray*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 120 x 120cm
73. *John Gay*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 120 x 120cm
74. *Gerhard Richter, October 18, 1977, 1988*, details of three of fifteen paintings, oil on canvas, Installation variable. Sourced from:
75. *John White*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 120 x 120cm
76. *freehand character on street*, 2006, Launceston.
77. *"Intimidating exhibition sure to draw a reaction"* Simon Bevilaqua, *Sunday Tasmanian*, March 25, 2007, p.11
78. *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*, 2007, installation views, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport



79. *I Just Died In Your Arms Tonight*, 2007, spray enamel and oil paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
80. *Internet Killed the Video Star*, 2007, spray enamel and oil paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
81. *America, Fuck Yeah!*, 2007, spray enamel and household enamel paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
82. *Get the Girl, Kill the Baddies and Save the Entire Planet*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
83. *Closer*, 2007, spray enamel and oil paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
84. *Don't Cha (Wish Your Girlfriend Was Hot Like Me)*, 2007, spray enamel paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
85. *Touched (By the Hand of God)*, 2007, spray enamel and oil paint on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
86. *Smells Like Gay Lennon*, 2007, spray enamel on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
87. *Turning Howardese I Think I'm Turning Howardese I Really Think So (or Jaundiced Eye)*, 2007, spray enamel on aluminium, 180 x 180cm
88. *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*, 2007, spray enamel on aluminium, 180 x 180cm

## Artist C.V.

### Benjamin Kluss (a.k.a. Jamin)

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### Born 1976, Australia

#### Education

- 2008 Master of Fine Art, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania
- 2005 Bachelor of Fine Art with Honours (First Class), Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania
- 2004 Bachelor of Fine Art, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania
- 1998 Trade Certificate Graphic Pre-Press, Hobart & Adelaide Institute of TAFE

#### Teaching

- 2006 (Current) Casual tutor in Painting, Core Studies and Graphic Design, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania

#### Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 *INERTIA / FORCE / CHANGE / INERTIA*, Criterion Gallery, Hobart  
*MFA Thesis Exhibition*, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart
- 2007 *First We Take Paris, Then We Take the World*, Devonport Regional Gallery Solo Commission 2007, Devonport  
*Tasmania: Explore the Possibilities*, INFLIGHT ARI, Hobart
- 2006 *Common Ground*, BUS ARI, Melbourne
- 2005 *A.K.A.*, Criterion Gallery @ Amulet Restaurant, Hobart
- 2004 *Evoluntary*, Nourish, Hobart

#### Die Laughing Collective Solo Exhibitions (Jamin, Paicey & Empire)

- 2008 *Heavy Weight*, Blender Studios, Melbourne
- 2006 *May's*, May Lane, Sydney  
*The Rat Palace*, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart
- 2005 *Die Laughing*, Earlyspace Gallery, Melbourne
- 2004 *Dissent Disrupt Desert*, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2008 *Contemporary Australia: Positivism*, Curated by Julie Ewington, Gallery of Modern Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane  
*Some Dayz*, Blender Gallery, Melbourne  
*One Night Only Project (O.N.O.)*, Curated by Kate Kelly and Pip Stafford, Tepid Baths, Hobart  
*Lucha Libre!*, Curated by Victor Medrano, INFLIGHT ARI, Hobart  
*Summer Selection*, Criterion Gallery, Hobart
- 2007 *CAST Members Exhibition 2007*, CAST Gallery, Hobart  
*Urban Skins*, Pinnacles Gallery, Thurgow, Queensland  
*Urban Art Agenda #1* (with Die Laughing Collective), Shed 4, Docklands, Melbourne.  
*Board of INFLIGHT*, Firstdraft ARI, Sydney; ArtsAlive, Launceston; INFLIGHT ARI, Hobart.  
*Stencil Festival 2007*, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Sale, Ballarat.  
*E.G.*, curated by Briony Nainby, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart  
*Sea Change, Kill Difference*, curated by Tim Panaretos, Red Wall Gallery, Hobart  
*Selected Cuts*, Higher Ground, Adelaide Fringe Festival, Adelaide
- 2006 *...text me*, curated by Ellie Ray, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport  
*2006 Melbourne / Sydney Stencil Festival*, Melbourne & Sydney  
*May's Retrospective Exhibition* (with Die Laughing Collective), Building 1 Factory 1, Sydney  
*Hatched '06*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Perth  
*Sticker Fix*, Sabotage Gallery, Hobart  
*Red Wall Gallery Opening Exhibition*, Red Wall Gallery, Hobart  
*Group Action 2*, Criterion Gallery, Hobart
- 2005 *Artmart 2*, Sabotage Gallery, Hobart  
*Highly Recommended* (Honours Grad Show), Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart  
*Artmart*, Urban Café / Sabotage, Hobart  
*Fat & Flat* (TUU Painting & Sculpture Society), Long Gallery, Hobart  
*Criminal Intent* (with Die Laughing Collective), HO Gallery, Melbourne  
*Melbourne Stencil Festival* (with Die Laughing Collective), Meat Markets, Melbourne
- 2004 *Head of School's Summer Selection*, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart  
*1000 Words*, 112 Liverpool Street, Hobart  
*Wall to Wall*, Bookamoré Café, Hobart  
*Avago Prize Exhibition*, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart  
*Emerging*, The Top Gallery @ Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart

### Grants, Awards and Commissions

- 2008 *The Across Project*, Arts Tasmania Assistance to Individuals Grant for an outdoor billboard project
- 2007 *Devonport Regional Gallery Solo Commission 2007*, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport
- Bowen Road Primary Mural* (with Die laughing Collective), Bowen Road Primary, Moonah
- Syrup Nightclub Mural* (with Die Laughing Collective), Syrup Nightclub, Hobart
- 2006 *Australian Post-graduate Award* research scholarship, University of Tasmania
- ArtsBridge* grant recipient, Arts Tasmania (with Die Laughing Collective)
- A Place in the World* Finalist, Visual Art Prize, ACU and University of Adelaide, Adelaide
- Undertone Mural* (with Empire), Undertone Café, Hobart
- 2005 *Youngtown Underpass Mural*, Public Art Commission (with Die laughing Collective), Youngtown Primary School, Launceston
- Springvale Hostel Stairwell* (with Die Laughing Collective), Art for Public Buildings Scheme (APBS), Spring Vale Hostel, New Town
- Kid Throws a Rock at The World* (with Die Laughing Collective), Private Commission, Hobart

### Collections

- MAY's Collection, Sydney
- Criterion Gallery Collection, Hobart
- Ballarat Fine Art Gallery Collection, Ballarat
- University of Tasmania Collection, Hobart
- Jamin's work is also held in a number of private collections.

### Professional Appointments

- 2008 (Current) Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST), Board Member
- 2006 (Current) INFLIGHT Artist Run Initiative, Chair of the Board, Hobart
- 2005 INFLIGHT Artist Run Initiative, Board Member
- 2006-8 Red Wall Gallery, Founding Partner / Co-Director, Republic Bar & Café, Hobart

### Workshops / Community Work

- 2008 Stencilling Residency, Woodleigh School, Gippsland, Victoria
- 2007 Stencilling Residency, Woodleigh School, Gippsland, Victoria
- Bridging the Gap*, Art Director/Designer, Kick Start Arts & Elizabeth College, Hobart



- Stencilling / Character Workshop, Houn Valley Council, Huonville
- 2006 Stencilling & Mural Workshop, Glenorchy Works Festival, Cosgrove High, Hobart
- Mural & Character Workshop, Streets Alive Festival, Launceston
- 2005 Stenciling & Mural Workshop, St. Mary's College, Hobart

### Employment

- 2003 (Ongoing) Self-employed Graphic Designer/Web Designer/Sign Writer
- 1994-8 Graphic Pre-Press, Trade Apprenticeship, Livingston Printers, Hobart

### Publications / Reviews

- 2007 *Off the Wall*, Rebecca Fitzgibbon, The Mercury, 16.11.07, p.49
- First We Take Paris The We Take the World*, Tom Wilson, Sauce Magazine #52, October 07
- New exhibition's unique perspective*, Megan Hogarth, The Advocate, 15.09.07, p.42
- J Arts Crew: First We Take Paris*, Jennifer Hopper, The Program, 10.09.07, [www.theprogram.net.au](http://www.theprogram.net.au)
- First We Take Paris The We Take the World* Catalogue, text by Scott Cotterell, Devonport: Devonport Regional Gallery, ISBN 978-0-9775913-6-7
- Spray Play*, Travers Purton, Beat Magazine, May Issue, p.28
- Trouble Magazine*, front cover, May 07 Issue, Melbourne
- eg., Exhibition Catalogue, text by Briony Nainby, Plimsoll Gallery
- Uncommissioned Art: An A-Z of Australian Graffiti* Christine Dew, Melbourne University Publishing.
- Die Laughing Collective: Shaking you awake* Chris Delaney, Acclaim Magazine, Issue #8, Aug 2007, pp 72-73, [www.acclaimmag.com](http://www.acclaimmag.com)
- We Are The Image Makers Issue 10* - Feature and interview, [www.watim.com](http://www.watim.com)
- Intimidating exhibition sure to draw a reaction* Simon Bevilacqua, Sunday Tasmanian, 25.3.07, p. 11
- 2006 *Think Outside the Box*, Tracey Clement, Australian Art Review, Jul-Oct 2006, pp.58-60
- Artful new ways of communicating*, Joyclynn Biner, The Advocate, 05.08.06, p.31
- Have Brush Will Travel* Ted Snell, The Australian, 3-4.6.06, Review p. 18-19
- Perfect Hatch*, Zebra Magazine, May Issues 249, p. 13 & cover
- Street Cool* Rebecca Fitzgibbon, The Mercury, 10.2.06, p. 29

2005 *J Arts Crew: Jamin* Carol Raabus, [www.theprogram.net.au](http://www.theprogram.net.au), Feature August 2005.

*Living in Indignant Times* Jonathan Dawson, The Mercury, 30.8.05 p.17

*Simple art form brings a powerful message home* Jane Rankin-Reid, The Mercury, 26.9.04 p.37

*Hairy heir to post-9/11 paranoias* Genevieve Read, The Mercury, 28.8.04 p.23

### **Broadcast**

Jamin has been interviewed and/or reviewed by various radio and TV stations including ABC News Tasmania (TV), WIN TV News, ABC Radio National, Triple J, RRR (Melbourne), 3CR Community Radio (Melbourne), Kiss FM (Melbourne) and Edge Radio (Hobart).